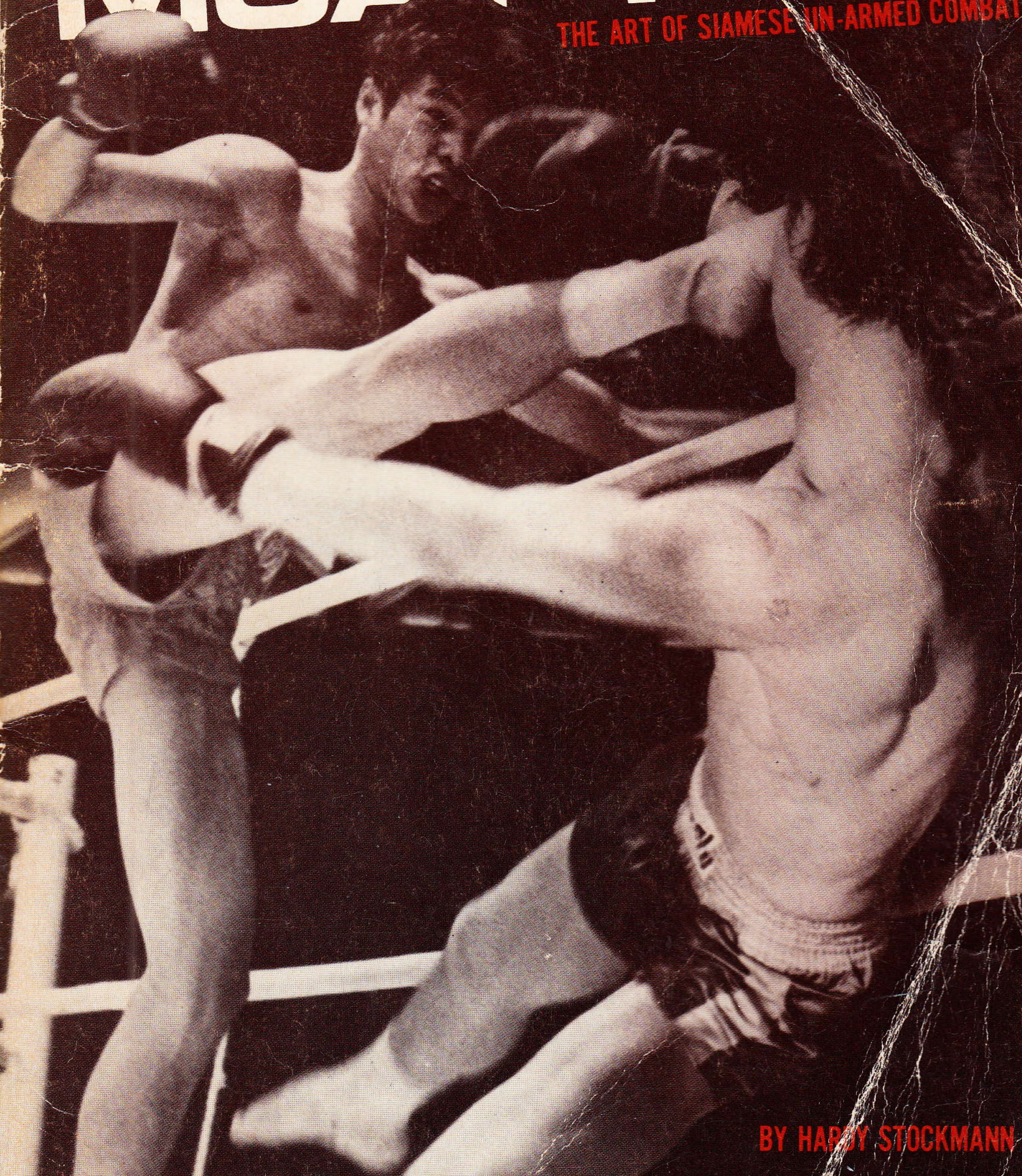
# KICK BOXING
# MUAY-THAI

## THE ART OF SIAMESE UN-ARMED COMBAT



BY HARDY STOCKMANN

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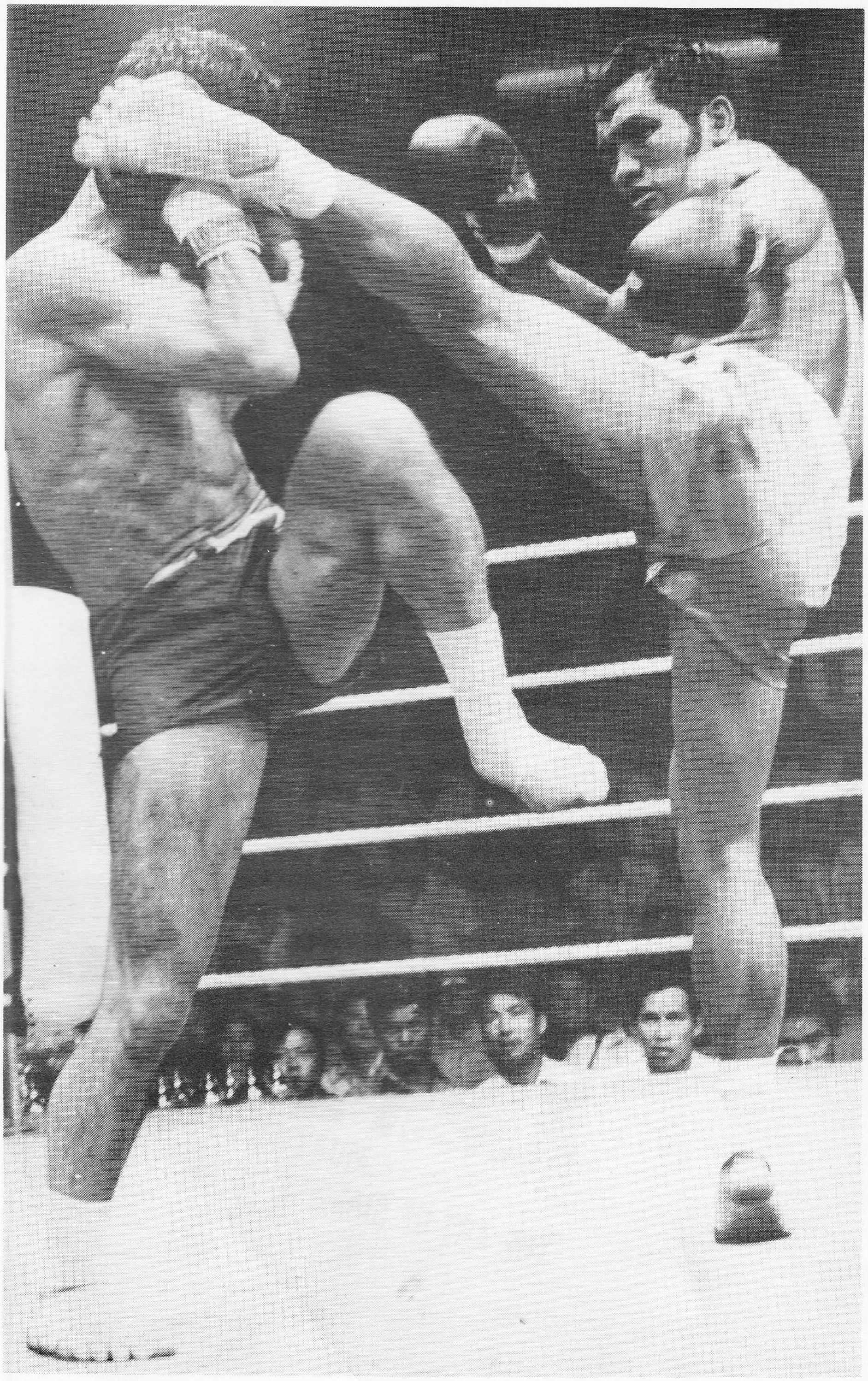

# KICK BOXING

## MUAY-THAI
## THE ART OF SIAMESE UN-ARMED COMBAT

### by Hardy Stockmann

*For Musi-Lasa,*
*who taught me more about Thailand and its wonderful people,*
*than anyone else.*

*Edited by Charles Lucas*

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The author wishes to express his thanks to the many teachers, trainers, camp managers, promoters and literally thousands of fighters, all of whom have contributed to his understanding of the art of Muay-Thai.

His special gratitude goes to each of the following, who have either directly or indirectly, played a considerable part in the production of the manuscript and photographs for this book.

Ajarn Khetr Sriyabhaya, the grand old man of Muay-Thai, who is probably the highest authority on Thai fighting arts alive today. At the age of 74 he is still active as a boxing teacher, writes regular columns on the art in Thai newspapers, and has graciously consented to write the preface for this book.

The Muay-Thai teachers and camp fathers Kruh Singhprasert (Brong Trairot), Kruh Wallop Pasapan, Lung Chao Chaweewong, Chumnan Chaweewong, Manop (Manusak) Apibansri, Pracha Thongthew and Ajarn Suwit Gayao.

The promoters, managers and officials, Thiemboon Intrabutr, Manu Kosum, Indra Vichien, Banjob Limcharoon, Boontam Naraipan, Udorn Aroonkit and Tiva Sukhantha. The fighters Pradermchai Barbos, Pichit Suragawsang, Chenoi Singdabploeng, Sonthaya Lukpalabody, Singhtamin Singhprasert.

And last but far from least, Anton Perera, Amarat Premsingkorn, William Young, Donald Gibson, Albert Pereira and Pornpimon Souvannaphong.

The author apologizes for the inconvenience caused by rummaging through their files in search of illustrations, and appreciates the permission to use the photographs that appear by courtesy of: The Bangkok Post, The Nation and Indra Vichien.

All other photographs by Hardy Stockmann.

# INTRODUCTION

The mention of Thailand, often advertised as the "Land of Smiles," usually creates an image of pretty girls, friendly rice farmers and temples with yellow-robed monks. Few foreigners would associate the Siamese with violence or even cruelty, yet this is exactly what they have been accused of by tourists who have watched a Muay-Thai bout for the first time. The use of elbows, knees and feet in the ring is foreign to them and what looks to the uninitiated like an "everything goes" massacre, has proved to be not every visitor's favorite form of entertainment.

A middle-aged European lady, sitting with a group of tourists, was fascinated by the action in the ring until blood started to flow. Suddenly she gulped and regurgitated all over the man sitting in front of her. During a championship bout in a Bangkok arena I overheard an American serviceman explaining to his friend that all the fights are fixed. "It's just a show, like wrestling on TV." In the second round the champ landed a powerful knee-kick in the challenger's solar plexus, bending him over like a jack-knife. An elbow punch followed to the top of the spine, slowly dropping the already unconscious fighter, while a sickening sound issued from his mouth. The GI hurried out of the stadium, his face the color of chalk.

Muay-Thai, freely translated as Thai-style-boxing, is pronounced moo-ee-tie. It has been called many names, from the loftiest to the lowest. Variously described as: a vigorous sport, a savage game that should be prohibited, the best system of self defense, a vast business, our own cherished fighting art inherited from our ancestors, a corrupt and primitive pastime, a major tourist attraction, a gambling institution, and it naturally has its fans as well as adversaries. But whatever the pros and cons, Muay-Thai is by far the most popular spectator sport in the country, and has awakened the interest of martial arts practitioners all over the world.

With hundreds of thousands of followers throughout the kingdom, this unique fighting style is taught in cities and villages, in army, police and college gyms. The excitement on fight night is the same, whether a bout is staged in one of Bangkok's international arenas or on a hastily erected platform in the fair grounds of a small hamlet in a remote province. Bangkok television stations devote eight hours a week to live transmission.

It was in 1967 in Bangkok, where I saw my first Muay-Thai ring battles, and being an active martial arts practitioner, I got interested in the finer points of this fighting style. But information was not easy to come by. Apart from a tourist brochure and a couple of superficially treated books in the Thai language, no literature was available. Neither bookstores nor libraries had anything comprehensive on the subject. I had to find out the hard way.

For some years my spare time was filled with visits to training camps and fight arenas. I interviewed, discussed and argued with boxers, trainers and promoters in cities and villages. During my travels I came across temple-fair tournaments and vicious unofficial challenge fights. Unfortunately my research into historical records was not very successful, simply because the material available is rather limited. After watching several thousand bouts, and later officiating in some of them as ring judge or referee (as far as I can ascertain, no other foreigner has ever been allowed to act as an official in a Muay-Thai contest), I felt competent to talk about Thai-style fighting methods.

Numerous inquiries from foreigners in Thailand and interested persons abroad were instrumental in my decision to publish the information I have collected over the years. This book is the result. It is not a comprehensive treatise on the subject, but simply an introduction to an interesting fighting art and a popular sport. It is not intended to be a training manual, although, in the absence of a Muay-Thai teacher, it might aid those interested in learning some of the techniques. The moves shown in the book are used by the majority of Thai boxers and can all be seen during an ordinary fight night. I have purposely omitted the more spectacular techniques, which are hard to learn, quite useless in combat, and never seen in the ring, although in theory they are part and parcel of the art of Muay-Thai.

Chiang Mai / Thailand
July 1975

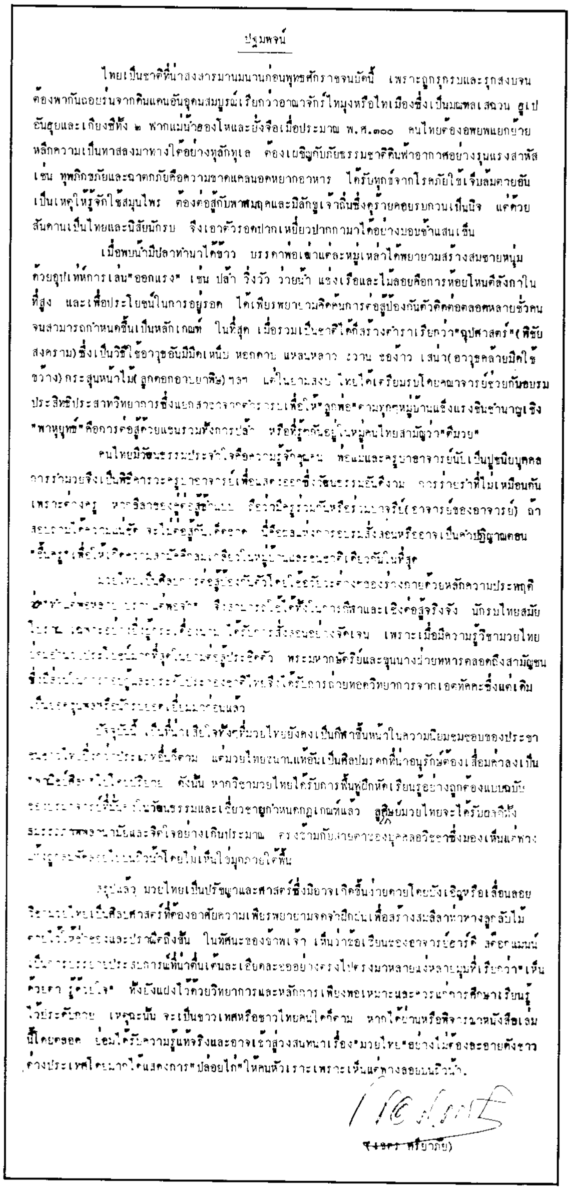
# PREFACE

The Thais have deserved sympathy for a very long time, that is, from before the beginning of the Buddhist era until the present. They were constantly harassed and their peaceful existence disturbed until about 250 B.C., when they left the rich and fertile land called Thai Mung or Thai Muang, believed to have been in the area of today's Szechuan, Hupei, Anwei and Kiangsi provinces, on both sides of the rivers Yangtze and Hwang Ho in central China.

In order to avoid enslavement, the Thais evacuated and dispersed in all directions. Eventually, and with great difficulty, encountering many hardships and having to cope with starvation, injury, disease and death, they became experts in what is today called traditional medicine. Fending off wild animals and all-too-frequent battles with savage warlords who never missed a chance to attack, only strengthened their fighting spirit, and their love of freedom overcame all difficulties. Weakened, suffering severely and exhausted, they escaped.

When the refugees had settled in an area where there were "fish in the water and rice in the fields," elders of the different clans attempted to build up the courage and skill of the young men by promoting athletic games such as wrestling, running, swimming, boat races and acrobatics. For reasons of security and to ensure their future freedom, a system of self defense was devised, which after generations of changes and improvements resulted in a set of rules and regulations. When the clans were finally unified into a nation, a manual of warfare, the "Chupasart," was drawn up. It dealt mainly with the use of weaponry such as knives, swords, spears, battle axes, halberds, throwing knives and poisoned arrows shot with crossbows. During times of peace, the Thais trained under the guidance of experienced warriors, learning the different fighting techniques based on the manual, but often substituting the "arm" for the real weapon, in other words, practicing unarmed combat, or what is commonly known to Thais as "dee muay" or boxing.

An inherent cultural characteristic of the Thais is to show respect and gratitude, especially to those who impart knowledge, like parents and teachers. A worthy and beautiful custom is a boxer's way of paying homage to his teacher by performing the "ram muay" or boxing dance. This ritual differs from camp to camp and should two fighters be seen rendering a similar performance, they are almost certainly students of the same teacher, or their instructors might have come from the same camp.



ปฐมพจน์

ไทยเป็นชาติที่น่าสงสารมานมนานก่อนพุทธศักราชจนบัดนี้ เพราะถูกรุกรบและรุกสงบจนต้องพากันถอยร่นจากดินแดนอันอุดมสมบูรณ์เรียกว่าอาณาจักรไหมุงหรือไทเมืองซึ่งเป็นมณฑลเสฉวน สูเป อันฮุยและเกียงซีทั้ง ๒ ฟากแม่น้ำฮองโหและยังจือเมื่อประมาณ พ.ศ.๓๐๐ คนไทยต้องอพยพแยกย้ายหลีกความเป็นทาสลงมาทางใต้อย่างทุลักทุเล ต้องเผชิญกับภัยธรรมชาติดินฟ้าอากาศอย่างรุนแรงสาหัส เช่น ทุพภิกขภัยและฉาตกภัยคือความขาดแคลนอดหยากอาหาร ได้รับทุกข์จากโรคภัยไข้เจ็บล้มตายอันเป็นเหตุให้รู้จักใช้สมุนไพร ต้องต่อสู้กับพาฬมฤคและมิลักขูเจ้าถิ่นซึ่งคู่ร้ายคอยรบกวนเป็นนิจ แต่ด้วยสันดานเป็นไทยและนิสัยนักรบ จึงเอาตัวรอดปากเหยี่ยวปากกามาได้อย่างบอบช้ำแสนเข็ญ

เมื่อพบน้ำมีปลาทำนาได้ข้าว บรรดาพ่อเฒ่าแต่ละหมู่เหล่าได้พยายามสร้างสมชายหนุ่มด้วยอุปเท่ห์การเล่น"ออกแรง" เช่น ปล้ำ วิ่งวัว ว่ายน้ำ แข่งเรือและไม้ลอยคือการห้อยโหนตีลังกาในที่สูง และเพื่อประโยชน์ในการอยู่รอด ได้เพียรพยายามคิดค้นการต่อสู้ป้องกันตัวติดต่อตลอดหลายชั่วคน จนสามารถกำหนดขึ้นเป็นหลักเกณฑ์ ในที่สุด เมื่อรวมเป็นชาติได้ก็สร้างตำราเรียกว่า"ฉุปศาสตร์"(พิชัยสงคราม)ซึ่งเป็นวิธีใช้อาวุธอันมีมีดเหน็บ หอกดาบ แหลนหลาว [illegible] [illegible] เสน่า(อาวุธคล้ายมีดใช้ขว้าง) กระสุนหน้าไม้(ลูกดอกอาบยาพิษ) ฯลฯ แต่ในยามสงบ ไทยได้เตรียมรบโดยอาจารย์ช่วยกันอบรมประสิทธิประสาทวิทยาการซึ่งแยกสาขาจาก[illegible]เพื่อให้"ลูกผู้"ตามทุกๆหมู่บ้านแข็งแรงชินชำนาญเชิง"พาหุยุทธ์"คือการต่อสู้ด้วยแขนรวมทั้งการปล้ำ หรือที่รู้กันอยู่ในหมู่คนไทยสามัญว่า"ตีมวย"

คนไทยมีวัฒนธรรมประจำใจคือความรู้จักคุณคน พ่อแม่และครูบาอาจารย์นับเป็นปูชนียบุคคล การรำมวยจึงเป็นพิธีคารวะครูบาอาจารย์เพื่อแสดงออกซึ่งวัฒนธรรมอันดีงาม การร่ายรำที่ไม่เหมือนกันเพราะต่างครู [illegible] (อาจารย์ของอาจารย์) ถ้า [illegible] ปฏิญาณตน [illegible] ในที่สุด

มวยไทยเป็นศิลปการต่อสู้ป้องกันตัว [illegible] ด้วยหลักความประพฤติ [illegible] ทั้งในการกีฬาและเชิงต่อสู้จริงจัง นักรบไทยสมัย [illegible] ได้รับการสั่งสอนอย่างจริงจัง เพราะเมื่อมีความรู้วิชามวยไทย [illegible] พระมหากษัตริย์และขุนนางฝ่ายทหารตลอดถึงสามัญชน [illegible] ได้รับการถ่ายทอดวิทยาการจากเอตทัคคะซึ่งแต่เดิม [illegible]

ปัจจุบันนี้ เป็นที่น่าเสียใจ [illegible] มวยไทยยังคงเป็นกีฬาชั้นหน้าในความนิยมชมชอบของประชา [illegible] แต่มวยไทย [illegible] อันเป็นศิลปมรดกที่น่าอนุรักษ์ต้องเสื่อมค่าลงเป็น [illegible] ดังนั้น หากวิชามวยไทยได้รับการฟื้นฟูฝึกหัดเรียนรู้อย่างถูกต้องแบบฉบับ [illegible] วัฒนธรรมและเชี่ยวชาญกำหนดกฎเกณฑ์แล้ว ลูกศิษย์มวยไทยจะได้รับ [illegible] และจิตใจอย่างเกินประมาณ ตรงข้ามกับ [illegible] ซึ่งมองเห็นแต่ทาง [illegible] บนผิวน้ำโดยไม่เห็นไข่มุกภายใต้พื้น

สรุปแล้ว มวยไทยเป็นปรัชญาและศาสตร์ซึ่งมิอาจเกิดขึ้นง่ายดายโดยบังเอิญหรือเลื่อนลอย [illegible] เป็นศิลปศาสตร์ที่ต้องอาศัยความเพียรพยายามจดจำฝึกฝนเพื่อสร้างสมลีลาท่าทางลูกลับไม้ [illegible] และปราณีตถึงขั้น ในทัศนะของข้าพเจ้า เห็นว่าข้อเขียนของอาจารย์ฮาร์ดี สต๊อกแมนน์ [illegible] ที่น่าตื่นเต้นละเอียดละออ อย่างตรงไปตรงมาหลายแง่หลายมุมที่เรียกว่า"เห็นด้วยตา รู้ด้วยใจ" ทั้งยังแฝงไว้ด้วยวิทยาการและหลักการเพียงพอเหมาะและควรแก่การศึกษาเรียนรู้ไว้ประดับกาย เหตุฉะนั้น จะเป็นชาวเทศหรือชาวไทยคนใดก็ตาม หากได้อ่านหรือพิจารณาหนังสือเล่มนี้โดยตลอด ย่อมได้รับความรู้แท้จริงและอาจเข้าสู่วงสนทนาเรื่อง"มวยไทย"อย่างไม่ต้องละอายดังชาวต่างประเทศโดยมากได้แสดงการ"ปล่อยไก่"ให้คนหัวเราะเพราะเห็นแต่ทางลอยบนผิวน้ำ.

(เขตร ศรียาภัย)

Khetr Sriyabhaya is one of the most venerable and respected men in Thailand. His studies of that country's culture are profound. Mr. Sriyabhaya is a muay-thai enthusiast. When he learned of Hardy Stockmann's forthcoming book on his favorite subject, he was happy to render a preface in the native calligraphy of Thailand. Author Stockmann translated it. A photograph of the original text appears at the left. It is one of the most articulate introductions to a book that I have ever had the privilege of reading. *C. Lucas, Editor, Ohara.*

If an inquiry reveals this to be true, the two boxers will on no account fight each other. This tradition is the result of strict disciplinary training and the pledge given during the "khuen kruh" ceremony. It ensures a feeling of close unity in the camps and villages, and is meant to foster a sense of belonging to the race as a whole.

Muay-Thai is an art of self defense using various parts of the

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body. Because it is based on the principle of "doing no more than necessary to teach a lesson," it is equally well suited to be used as a competitive sport as well as a "fight to the finish." In ancient times, Thai warriors had intensive training in the art, giving them a distinct advantage in close-combat situations. Royalty, military leaders and those common people having a part in defending the nation, received regular instruction by leading exponents of the art.

Muay-Thai is also a very popular spectator sport, enjoyed by Thais more than any other. All the greater is the tragedy, that a national heritage which should be preserved, has deteriorated into a "commercial art." Only if Muay-Thai in its pure form is revived, instruction given and training conducted by the old rules, and ancient customs enforced by officials and teachers who do have the "right knowledge," will students receive lasting benefits beyond all expectation. Discipline, competence and perfect health of body and mind will be the guaranteed result, in spite of the views of the numerous "know-alls," ignorant of the real art, who can only "see dry rice straw, blown by the wind and floating on the surface of the water, but fail to see the pearl lying on the bottom."

In summary, Muay-Thai is a philosophy, a science, an art, unlikely to have come about easily or by chance. It is the result of diligence, perseverance, trials and errors and endless practice sessions to master those techniques that transform a beginner into an expert. In my opinion, this work, the result of Hardy Stockmann's personal experiences, is exciting, detailed and frank. It is treated from different angles with a genuine insight or as a Thai might describe it: "Seen with the eyes and known to the heart." The book contains all basic techniques, rules and principles, both adequate and suitable for personal study and the understanding of Muay-Thai. Whether foreign or Thai, if studied thoroughly, the reader will gain a true knowledge of the subject and may enter any circle of experts without fear of shame, unlike many of those bringing ridicule upon themselves, for they "can only see the dry straw floating on the surface of the water."

Khetr Sriyabhaya.

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# HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Among the multitudes of Muay-Thai fans in the country one will have to search for the proverbial needle in the haystack to find someone with an interest in or knowledge of the sport's history. To be sure, everybody has heard the legends of the tremendous feats performed by Muay-Thai fighters in bygone days, but almost all these stories appear to have their origin in the mind of some long-forgotten author, at least in the form they are told today.

The best known and most celebrated of the early fighting greats was Nai Khanom Dhom, who, having been captured by the Burmese, regained his freedom by defeating twelve of the enemy's gladiators in an unarmed contest, witnessed by the Burmese king. His story is related in many versions and appears in grade school textbooks. All stadia in the country honor the hero by dedicating one fight night a year to him. It has been established without doubt that Nai Khanom Dhom was an historical figure, although no records exist in Thailand. The most reliable confirmation came from Burma.

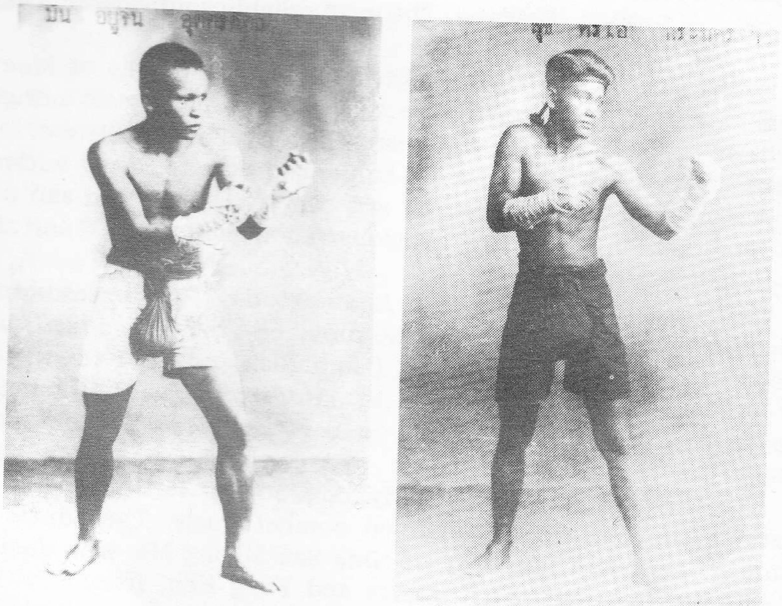
Researchers who have attempted to uncover details of Muay-Thai's past have met with little success. The fighting art's origin remains unknown. Thailand's early historical records were lost forever in 1767, when Burmese armies laid siege to Siam's ancient capital of Ayuddhaya. The city was captured, ransacked and put to the torch. All treasures, religious relics, works of art and the royal archives were destroyed.

Thailand's history, as it is known today, has been pieced together from records kept in the provinces, the writings of early European visitors and Burmese, Cambodian and Chinese sources. It is from this amalgamation of information, with its many contradictory statements, that our little knowledge of early Muay-Thai comes.

It seemed to have been fairly common to settle disputes of national importance by unarmed combat duels. The annals of Chiang Mai relate the story of King Sen Muang Ma, who died in 1411. His two sons, Yi Kumkam and Fang Ken, fought for the throne, and after a long conflict neither could get the upper hand. Fang Ken suggested settling the issue by single combat. Each side was to select a champion boxer from among his followers who were to fight until blood was drawn. The prince whose boxer lost would forfeit his claim to becoming the new ruler. The terms were accepted by both sides. The bout lasted for several hours before Fang Ken's fighter received a scratch on his foot which showed a trickle of blood. The contest was over and Yi Kumkam became the new king.

During the reign of King Naresuen the Great (1590-1605), Muay-Thai was part of military training. The king himself was an expert in individual combat techniques and won several contests which had considerable historical consequences. In 1577, at the age of 22 he was declared a national hero. Although firearms were already in use at the time, Muay-Thai was an important item on a warrior's training schedule. It supplemented the sword and pike in close-in fighting.

Muay-Thai reached the height of its popularity during the reign of Pra Chao Sua, the "Tiger King" (1703-1709). Siam was at peace with her neighbors and the army idle. Boxing became the favorite pastime of the population, with young and old, rich and poor



Before the introduction of gloves the hands were bandaged with hemp rope or glue-soaked cotton. A seashell protects the groin (left). The fighter (right) uses the bark of a tree over a cushion as a groin protector.

joining fighting camps. Every village staged its prize fights, and heavy betting, often for all or nothing, transformed ordinary bouts into vicious battles. The king himself was a skillful fighter and is reported to have visited village arenas incognito, challenged and defeated the local champions and, still undetected, walked off with the prize money. It was customary to bind hands and forearms with strips of horse hide in order to protect one's own skin and inflict the maximum damage to the opponent. Some of the techniques used today are said to be based on Pra Chao Sua's style of fighting.

The horse hide thongs were later replaced by hemp ropes or starched strips of cotton, soaked in glue before being tied to a boxer's hands. For some matches and with the agreement of both contestants, ground glass was mixed with the glue. The fighters wore groin guards of tree bark or sea shells, held in place with a piece of cloth tied between the legs and around the waist. In those days there were no such arrangements as weight divisions, or three-minute rounds. A bout lasted as long as a fighter could continue. Many a boxer is said to have left the arena on a bamboo stretcher — dead.

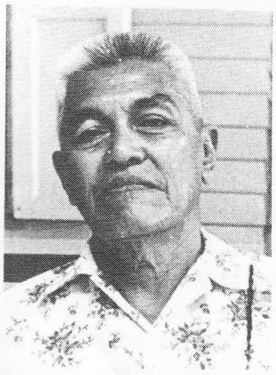
By the beginning of this century Muay-Thai was taught in schools until 1921, when too many serious injuries and several cases of brain damage prompted the government to prohibit the practice in all elementary and high schools. The use of hemp ropes and sea shells continued until the 1930s, when Muay-Thai underwent a major transformation. A number of rules and regulations from international boxing were adopted. Modern boxing gloves were introduced and the shell was replaced by a metal cup as a groin protector. Weight divisions were established and bouts staged in a modern ring.

According to some old-timers it was the death of Muay-Thai and the birth of a new sport.

## MUAY-THAI TODAY

Foreigners often describe Muay-Thai as the toughest, most dangerous contact sport practiced anywhere in the world today, a statement fully endorsed by most Thais. But old-timers smile patronizingly, "Compared to our days, Muay-Thai has become soft. The boys don't really know how to fight anymore."

Talking to a number of the old boxing teachers, some of them



Muay-Thai is often said to be the toughest contact sport practiced today (left). At age 73, Ajarn Ketr Sriyabhaya, former ring hero, still teaches the art of Muay-Thai. He also writes controversial articles in fight magazines.

in their eighties and still seen at the ringside, one will soon have to listen to their favorite topic, the decline of Muay-Thai. "We had to fight the little guys as well as the big ones and had to know all the tricks of the trade. We used techniques that today's boxers have never heard of. Besides, commercialism has destroyed the art." These ex-fighters are unanimous in their claim that the introduction of weight classes and three-minute rounds has killed their fight style. "Ask any of the flyweights to fight a middleweight and he wouldn't know where to begin. He might even run away. And look at their stamina. They are not as fit as we were, and they don't care. They know there's a break after three minutes and they can rest."

Commercialism, and especially the shows staged for the entertainment of tourists, are blamed for a general deterioration of the game. A prominent ex-teacher said: "A lot of foolery has been introduced for the sake of money. The young fighters have lost respect for the art." Boxing officials counter this accusation and explain that the fighters are professionals and make their living in the ring. "Granted, demonstration bouts for foreigners are of no consequence as far as a fighter's rating is concerned, so naturally he will not give his best. But the visitors will get an idea of what Muay-Thai is all about anyway."

Most fighters on the Bangkok circuit are from the provinces and, after showing promise by beating the boxers in their own area, have moved on to the capitol in search of fame and fortune. They usually come from the economically lowest strata of society and fight as often as they possibly can, averaging a bout every month provided they do not suffer from injuries. On the social scale a Muay-Thai fighter is not rated very highly, which finds expression in the Thai language by the use of a qualifier. While people are referred to as "khon," the word "dua" is used for animals. Although in Bangkok this practice is not apparent, people in the provinces will not say: "Nakmuay sip khon," meaning ten boxers, but use "Nakmuay sip dua." To a Thai, this would be the ultimate insult, but the boxers don't seem to care.

The introduction of boxing gloves and weight classes in the '30s has definitely resulted in the loss of a number of fighting techniques, but it has also brought benefits to Muay-Thai. Fighters were now matched against opponents of their own size and each category needed a new champion; two new regulations contributed considerably to an increase in active participation in the game, which at the time had been sadly on the decline. The elimination of fights between boxers greatly differing in weight and the wearing of gloves also reduced the rate of injuries and number of ring deaths.

The average Thai is of small build and over 70 percent of all fighters belong to the fly and bantamweight classes. Welter and middleweight fights are seen very infrequently and the still heavier categories are nonexistent. And perhaps just as well, as under present rules bouts between heavier boxers would certainly result in a much greater number of casualties than there are already. During the period February to April 1971, three boxers died as the result of knock-downs. Bangkok had a particularly black season in 1966/67, when within one year, the metropolitan circuit alone lost six fighters through ring deaths. Several years ago, a bout in Lampang, northern Thailand, ended in a double death. After a vicious slugging match one boxer died in the ring, his opponent the next day in a hospital.

According to an article in a medical journal, written by ring physician Dr. Supraketa Charutula, the injury most often incurred by fighters is a cut eyebrow, usually the result of an elbow attack. Death due to "acute subdural hemorrhage" occurs at an average of once in 1,500 bouts. What the doctor's statement means is that at the present number of bouts staged throughout the country, one fighter will die every three to four months.

But nevertheless, Muay-Thai retains its number one ranking on the popularity chart. At the time of writing, seven weeklies (one

Popular muay-thai magazines hit the stands each day of the week (left). Injuries are common at muay-thai matches. Here a fighter is helped out of the ring, a frequent occurrence.

appearing every day) and one monthly publication are exclusively devoted to the fight game. Muay-Thai motifs appear on postage stamps and matchbox covers. The enthusiasm has also gripped a number of foreigners, mostly American servicemen, who have joined training camps in different parts of the country. Frequent visits by Japanese kickboxers for special training under Thai teachers had resulted in the establishment of the "Noguchi Kick Boxing Gym," a modern training center in a coffee shop and brainchild of Tokyo promoter Osamu Noguchi. The idea of eating or having a drink in air-conditioned comfort while watching the Japanese during their workouts, appealed to the local fight community until Noguchi made a mistake. He declared in public that he was the originator of "kickboxing," omitting to make it clear that he was talking about the Japanese version, which includes karate, judo and wrestling moves. The Thais were fuming with indignation. In October 1972, less than a month after the gym had opened, Noguchi received death threats, shots were fired

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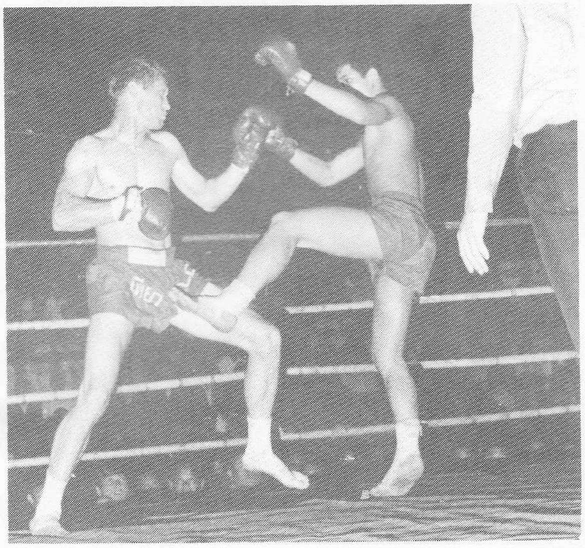
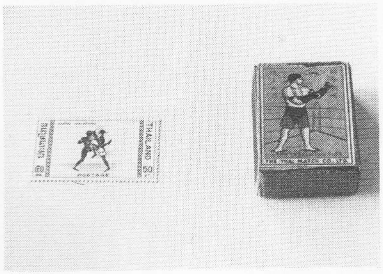
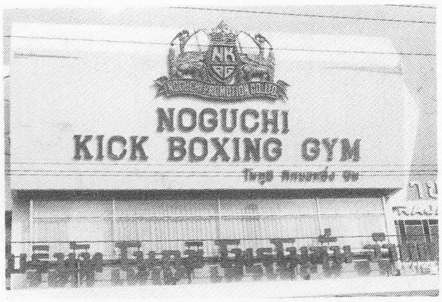
into the gym-cum-coffee shop and demonstrators threw rocks through the window. The gym was closed and the promoter hurried back to Tokyo.

Several Muay-Thai associations and the Tourist Organization of Thailand have repeatedly organized publicity drives to introduce



Dale Kvalheim (left) is one of several US servicemen into the art of muay-thai. Dale has made a name for himself by beating some of the best. Stylized oldtime fighters are celebrated on a postage stamp and matchbox cover (below).

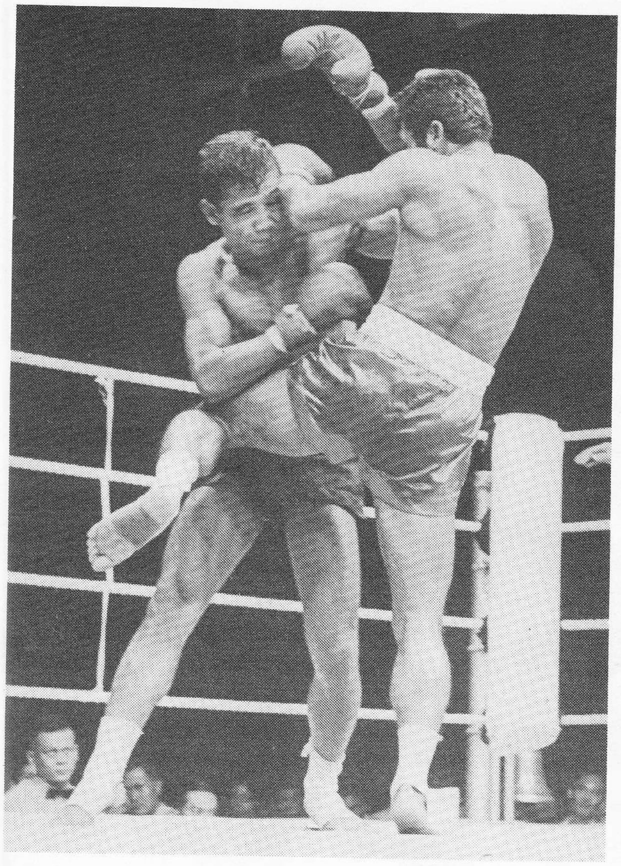




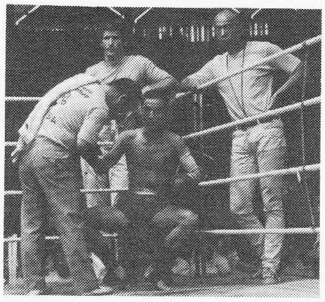
Bangkok Post

Noguchi's kick boxing gym and coffee shop in the Rajdamari Trade Center was the best and included air conditioning. Noguchi stated he was the originator of "kickboxing," but didn't say he meant the Japanese version. Rioters smashed the windows. Noguchi headed for Tokyo.

Voice of the Nation



Voice of the Nation



Sornnakrob Klatwayupak drives his left knee into the solar plexus of Dejnaka Sornram in this junior welterweight title fight with the king of Thailand in the audience. Sornnakrob retained his title with a unanimous decision and also won the Best Thai-style Boxer of the Year award. The king presented it. Some of Japan's 6000 kick boxers go to Bangkok to match skills with the Thai fighters. Gen Shiba (above) has gloves tightened while Japan's champions, middleweight ex-US Marine Raymond Edler and junior welterweight To Yokoyama second.

the sport in other countries. Films were distributed and teams of boxers were sent to demonstrate their fighting style in Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, several European countries and the United States. Their efforts were quite successful. In Japan, kickboxing has become increasingly popular since 1966. According to newspaper reports, the different Japanese organizations claim to have a total of over 6,000 active fighters. The Philippines have adopted Muay-Thai in a small way and in America the USA Kickboxing Association was established in 1971.

But the Thais weren't too happy. The foreigners have changed the rules to suit themselves. They have committed the sacrilege of doing away with the music and rituals, both an integral part of Muay-Thai. As a result, Thais call the foreigners' new styles "kickboxing" and reserve the name "Muay-Thai" for their traditional fighting system as practiced in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Burmese boxing, different yet somewhat related, is locally called Muay-Pama. The latest move in the international publicity drive was an application by Thailand for permission to stage exhibition bouts in Montreal during the 1976 Olympics.

The highlights of the Muay-Thai season for fighter and spectator, are the championship bouts and the contests for the "Best Boxer of the Year" title, awarded by His Majesty, King Bhumipon Adulyadet. Here not only the richest purses, but also the highest honor a boxer can win are vied for.

The average Thai fighter hangs up his gloves during his middle or late twenties, though there are exceptions. After leaving the ring many will enter the monkhood for a short time but return later to their camps to be among friends or train to stay fit. Some will act as assistant trainers and others, if they can afford to, open their own training camp. Very seldom will one find an ex-fighter who has divorced himself from the fight game altogether. The years of sweat and pain, the excitement on fight night, the elation after a victory and the bitter taste of defeat, all have part in a bond that has become too strong to break.

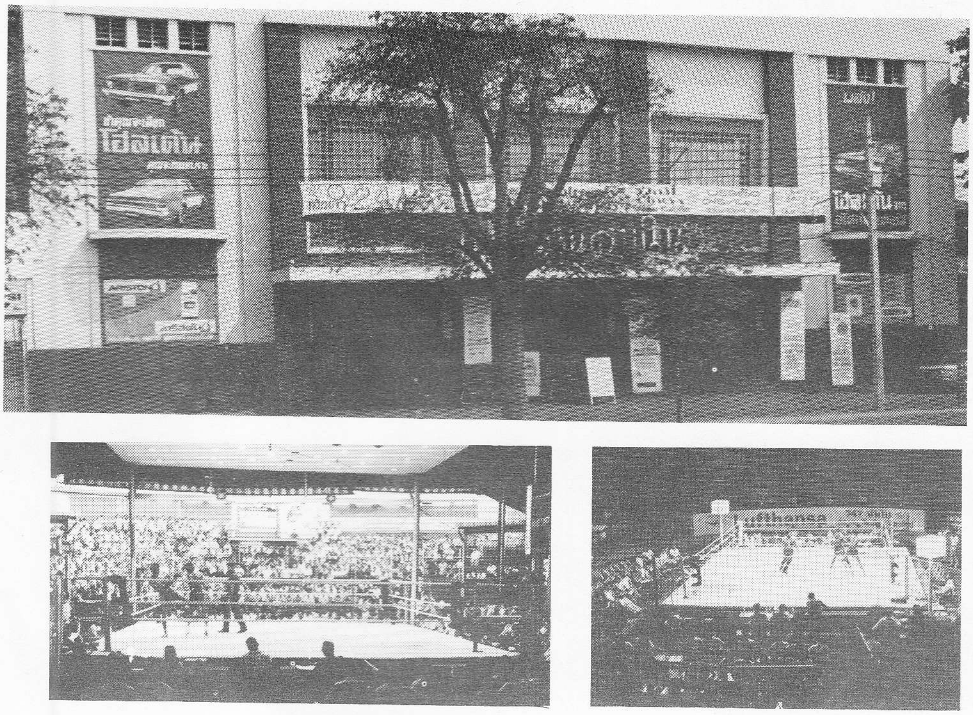
## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SPORT

Muay-Thai has no national "mother" organization. The sport is controlled by regional, or as is the case in the capital, rival associations, each with their own fight arenas, of which the best known are Bangkok's two international battle venues, Rajdamnern and Lumpini.

Rajdamnern Boxing Stadium, a modern concrete structure, is crown property and managed by the Royal Thai Army, while Lumpini Stadium, a partly open-air, partly roof-covered ramshackle affair, is run by the Thai Police Force. Both are considered the highest institutions of Muay-Thai, issue monthly ratings and have their own champions. It is the dream of every Thai boxer to gain acceptance and get promoted at either of the two stadia.

For many years, Thailand never had what could be called a national champion, because each weight division has two men at the top. It's always the "Rajdamnern Flyweight Champ," the "Lumpini Featherweight Champion," etcetera. Both stadia's top fighters are considered the best in their class, but hardly ever get to fight each other as champs. It was thought better to have two champions in the country than to lose face through possible defeat. Besides, business is better that way. Two top men bring in a lot more money than just one. As many boxers fight at both Rajdamnern and Lumpini, it is possible for a good man to reach the top in both charts by working his way up the ladder in both arenas.

Although generally considered as such, the ratings are not representative of the whole country. They are based solely on the bouts fought at the "big two's" own rings. Thailand has many excellent fighters in the provinces, especially the Northeast and the North, but unless they move to, and keep on fighting in Bangkok, they have no chance of being rated. A bout held in the province is of no consequence. The following tables will clearly show the unusual situation where the champion of the one might not even be rated by the other.



Rajdamnern Boxing Stadium is Thailand's oldest battle arena (top). The ring inside is shown (right). Popular Lumpini Stadium, the other of the big two of Thailand's arenas, is at lower left.

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## RATINGS FOR JUNE 1975

| | RAJDAMNERN | LUMPINI |
|---|---|---|
| **Junior Flyweight** | CH. vacant | CH. Yawded Singsornthong |
| | 1. Orachunnoi H. Mahachai | 1. Orachunnoi H. Mahachai |
| | 2. Fuangnoi Rotsongkram | 2. Nongrak Singkrungton |
| | 3. Tanuthong Griadmuangdai | 3. Tanuthong Griadmuangdai |
| | 4. Nongrak Singkrungton | 4. Dawood Saw Aw Naw |
| | 5. Yawded Singsornthong | 5. Muangchai Saktuanchai |
| | 6. Saengdao Sakprasert | 6. Jucktep Sitbantiang |
| | 7. Dawood Saw Aw Naw | 7. Saengdao Sakprasert |
| | 8. Sakarinnoi Sitsinsamut | 8. Nanfah Sriharatdeso |
| | 9. Nawa Sitchula | 9. Nuapet Sakornpitak |
| | 10. Jucktep Sitbantiang | 10. Apisit Satienyim |
| **Flyweight** | CH. Rakleck Suteenawee | CH. Rotdet Rotsongkram |
| | 1. Rotdet Rotsongkram | 1. Singnum Pettanin |
| | 2. Daonin Singaswin | 2. Petnamnung Mongkonpitak |
| | 3. Singnum Pettanin | 3. Daonin Singaswin |
| | 4. Petnamnung Mongkonpitak | 4. Skat Pornthawee |
| | 5. Skat Pornthawee | 5. Tanupit Sit Saw Waw |
| | 6. Singsuek S. Roopsuay | 6. Channoi Rungrit |
| | 7. Channoi Rungrit | 7. Manachai Petputorn |
| | 8. Sata Rawsawpaw | 8. Rakleck Suteenawee |
| | 9. Manachai Petputorn | 9. Sata Rawsawpaw |
| | 10. Tanupit Sit Saw Waw | 10. Fuangnoi Rotsongkram |
| **Bantamweight** | CH. Jockey Sitganpai | CH. Gairoong Lukchaomaesaithong |
| | 1. Keow Sitpawdaeng | 1. Wangwon Lukmatuli |
| | 2. Detoraneenoi Luadtaksin | 2. Detoraneenoi Luadtaksin |
| | 3. Wangwon Lukmatuli | 3. Keow Sitpawdaeng |
| | 4. Ruenpae Sitwatang | 4. Jockey Sitganpai |
| | 5. Yawdchat S. Jitpattana | 5. Adam Saw Aw Naw |
| | 6. Muanglai Sakkasem | 6. Chennoi Saw Siripan |
| | 7. Pruehad Lo-ngern | 7. Jaransak Thaweegriad |
| | 8. Adam Saw Aw Naw | 8. Saksakon Saktanin |
| | 9. Gairung Lukchaomaesaithong | 9. Singdetnoi Singmuangsayam |
| | 10. Saksakon Saktanin | 10. Thewarat Sitpontep |
| **Junior Featherweight** | CH. Saksit Sornburapa | CH. Bundit Singpragan |
| | 1. Sakpimai Griadbundit | 1. Permsiri Rungrit |
| | 2. Nongkhai S. Prapadsorn | 2. Narongnoi Griadbundit |
| | 3. Jitty Muangkhonkhaen | 3. Rernsak Pornthawee |
| | 4. Suksawat Srithewet | 4. Suksawat Srithewet |
| | 5. Chaipoom Sakwittaya | 5. Samoesing Tienhiran |
| | 6. Kukgong Ch.Lutichot | 6. Sukasem Prasitchai |
| | 7. Yawdgaen Rotsongkram | 7. Apisak Muangsurin |
| | 8. Lukmaw Sornsaksit | 8. Yawdsak Sitruckmuang |
| | 9. Sanyaluck Griadsunthorn | 9. Jitty Muangkhonkhaen |
| | 10. Thongbainoi Muangsongkwae | 10. Teeya Sitsayam |
| **Featherweight** | CH. vacant | CH. Sakpimai Ritweeboon |
| | 1. Permsiri Rungrit | 1. Saksit Sornburapa |
| | 2. Khunponnoi Griadsurya | 2. Nongkhai S. Prapadsorn |
| | 3. Rernsak Pornthawee | 3. Pansuek Queenchumpae |
| | 4. Sukasem Prasitchai | 4. Chaipoom Sakwittaya |
| | 5. Narongnoi Griadbundit | 5. Danpichit Wirapon |
| | 6. Detsakda Sornram | 6. Ruanpae Sitwatnang |
| | 7. Samoesing Tienhiran | 7. Thongbainoi Muangsongkwae |
| | 8. Siprae Duangprateep | 8. Manopsak Singkrungthep |
| | 9. Samyarn Singsornthong | 9. Muanglai Sakkasem |
| | 10. Teeya Sitsayam | 10. Lukmaw Sornsaksit |

CONTINUED

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|---|---|---|
| **Junior Lightweight** | CH. Vicharnnoi Pornthawee<br>1. Pothai Sitboonlert<br>2. Putpardnoi Vorawood<br>3. Bundit Singpragan<br>4. Virachat H. Mahachai<br>5. Chatrung Rotsongkram<br>6. Bangmot Lukbangkaw<br>7. Rung Singkasemphon<br>8. Suchart Sakornpitak<br>9. Graipet S. Prateep<br>10. Wangprai Rotsongkram | CH. Witchit Lukbangblasoi<br>1. Putpardnoi Vorawood<br>2. Pothai Sitboonlert<br>3. Khunponnoi Griadsurya<br>4. Netr Saknarong<br>5. Vicharnnoi Pornthawee<br>6. Chaiyood Sitboonlert<br>7. Seepae Duangprateep<br>8. Virachat Sorndaeng<br>9. Suchart Sakornpitak<br>10. Graipet S. Prateep |
| **Lightweight** | CH. vacant<br>1. Netr Saknarong<br>2. Wichit Lukbangblasoi<br>3. Chalermpon S. Ta-it<br>4. Monsawan Lukchiangmai<br>5. Sirimongkol Luksiripan<br>6. Muangchon Chirapan<br>7. Wangkeow Sityawdthong<br>8. Pongdetnoi Prasobchai<br>9. K[illegible]na Lerdyutacha<br>10. Samandet Ittichai | CH. Sirimongkol Luksiripan<br>1. Pood Lawleck<br>2. Chalermpon S. Ta-it<br>3. Chartprasert Rungrit<br>4. Chartrung Rotsongkram<br>5. Monsawan Lukchiangmai<br>6. Wangkeow Sityawdthong<br>7. Muangchon Chirapan<br>8. Wangprai Rotsongkram<br>9. Luadreo Kwanchaichonabot<br>10. Pongdetnoi Prasobchai |
| **Junior Welterweight** | CH. vacant<br>1. Pood Lawleck<br>2. Chartprasert Rungrit<br>3. Sornsak S. Lukbukkalo<br>4. Surakgan Klongpachon<br>5. Luadreo Kwanchaichonabot<br>6. Pansak Griadchalermchai<br>7. Gongnawa S. Prapadson<br>8. Muangklaeng Singsornthong<br>9. Bombrab H. Mahachai<br>10. Theprit Lukbanjamah | CH. Saensak Muangsurin<br>1. Satanfah S. Prateep<br>2. Prayood Sittiboonlert<br>3. Garawet Kwanchaichonabot<br>4. Sornsak S. Lukbukkalo<br>5. Buriram Suanmisgawan<br>6. Trang Sitpongchai<br>7. Surakgan Klongpachon<br>8. Pansak Griadchalermchai<br>9. Songgrad Griadpracharat<br>10. Memood Lukbotong |
| **Welterweight** | CH. Satanfah S. Prateep<br>1. Khunpol Sakornpitak<br>2. Prayood Sittiboonlert<br>3. Garawet Kwanchainchonabot<br>4. Saensak Muangsurin<br>5. Kongdet Lukbangblasoi<br>6. Pichit Singchuaploeng<br>7. Buriram Suanmisgawan<br>8. Memood Lukbotong<br>9. Harn Silathong<br>10. Trang Sitpongchai | CH. vacant<br>1. Pichit Singchuaploeng<br>2. Dewit Amornrat<br>3. Harn Silathong<br>4. Khunpol Sakornpitak<br>5. Kattanyoo Gritchai<br>6. Hemarat Muangsrithep<br>7. — 10. vacant |
| **Junior Middleweight** | This category is not used by Rajdamnern | CH. Hern Silathong<br>1. Kampaengkeow Sahaisuek<br>2. Dam Griadsamut<br>3. Detthai Ittichai<br>4. — 10. vacant |
| **Middleweight** | CH. vacant<br>1. Dewit Amornrat<br>2. Narong Pitsanurachan<br>3. Prapai Sitchumpol<br>4. Hemarat Muangsrithep<br>5. Hern Silathong<br>6. Yawdthong Sahaisuek<br>7. Clay S. Chuenchit<br>8. Saengdet Kemchat<br>9. Kampaengkeow Sahaisuek<br>10. vacant | CH. Prapai Sitchumpol<br>1. Kongdet Lukbangblasoi<br>2. Narong Pitsanurachan<br>3. Clay S. Chuenchit<br>4. Orachun Bawkawsaw<br>5. Paitoon Singmuangnakorn<br>6. Surasak Jitphanit<br>7. — 10. vacant |

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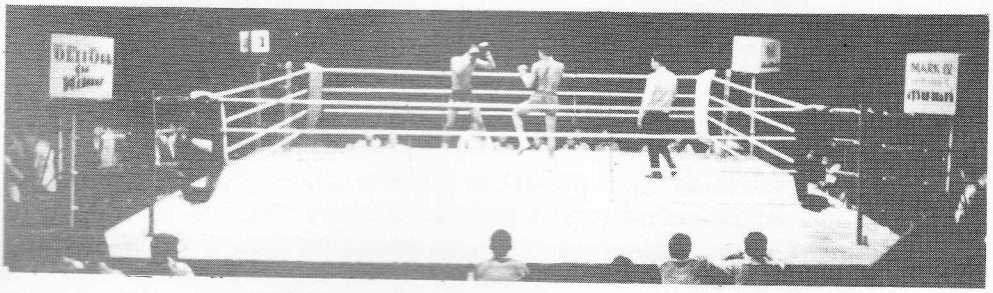

Television Channel 7's indoor stadium where the TBC bouts are held. Note the cameras mounted at corner posts. Veteran promoter, Thiemboon Intrabut, one of the initiators of the "Thailand Boxing Council," and its president (left).

In some cases boxers fight in the two stadia in different weight divisions, and even under a different name, in order to circumvent petty jealousies. Fortunately, during the last few years stubborn rival factions have somewhat relaxed their unreasonable rigidity, but things are still far from what they should be. To improve this situation, a group of enthusiasts founded the "Thailand Boxing Council" in August 1970, following a suggestion by fight organizer and veteran promoter, Thiemboon Intrabut. This independent body aims at the unification of Muay-Thai and encourages bouts between fighters of different organizations. It promotes fights, pitching top-rated boxers against each other, irrespective of affiliation. Thailand Boxing Council (TBC) bouts are staged at the Television Channel 7 indoor stadium in Bangkok. Its ratings are issued every three months and present a more realistic indication of the country's top fighters' standings, though not necessarily recognized by the "establishment," who tend to label TBC's boxers as "TV Champs."

Besides Bangkok, most provincial capitals and many district towns have their own boxing associations, centered around the local stadium. Membership is made up of promoters, ring officials and the area's camps, which are run by a "kruh muay" or boxing teacher.

Some of the older trainers still follow tradition and have their wards live in the camp. Here the fighters train, work and sleep, and are not supposed to leave the premises without permission; but this tradition is rapidly disappearing.

It is quite impossible to obtain accurate figures, but a number of interviews together with a little common sense calculation suggest that there are at present as many as 10,000 regular fighters throughout the country. The number of Muay-Thai practitioners, many of whom never enter a ring, is estimated to be in the region of 100,000. This includes those working out in colleges, police and army gyms, mainly for self defense reasons or just to stay fit.

According to the opinion of several stable managers in Bangkok, the metropolitan area alone has about five hundred camps, many of which are really tiny and don't deserve the name. Only about ten are fully equipped, modern training centers, besides the physical education colleges, where Muay-Thai is taught as a credit course, ever since the Ministry of Education declared the art a "traditional Thai sport," many years ago.

An interesting controversy raged for some time in Thai boxing circles, when Muay-Thai fighters, who are professionals, were chosen to represent Thailand in international amateur boxing contests. The argument by some officials, that Muay-Thai is a self defense system and a part of the "national culture," was rejected by the International Amateur Boxing Association and the International Olympic Committee, after almost two years of heated debates.

## THE ECONOMICS OF MUAY-THAI

According to a recent unofficial estimate up to 200,000 people derive an income from or through Muay-Thai. This seemingly high figure includes not only boxers, trainers and promoters, but embraces everybody in any way connected with the sport. Ice cream and soft drink vendors, taxi drivers, tourist guides and breweries, as well as the manufacturers of fight equipment, the sports press, radio and television; all benefit from the game.

Muay-Thai is a strictly professional affair. No boxer, whether schoolboy or veteran, would think of climbing through the ropes without a purse. He knows that he will get hurt however good he might be, and considers it only fair to get paid for his pains. A fighter's rates are not fixed but negotiated. They differ considerably, depending on a boxer's popularity and his manager's business talent. A youngster in the outbacks hardly expects more than thirty baht (US $1.50)* for his first bout, while the highest fee ever paid to a popular champion in Bangkok was 150,000 baht. Championship fights in the capital usually carry a purse of not

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*1 US Dollar = 20 Baht

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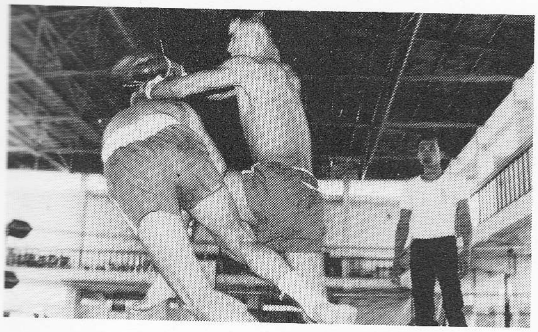
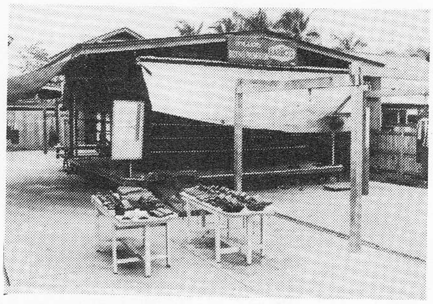
more than 10,000 baht for flyweights and go up to 30,000 baht for the heavier categories.

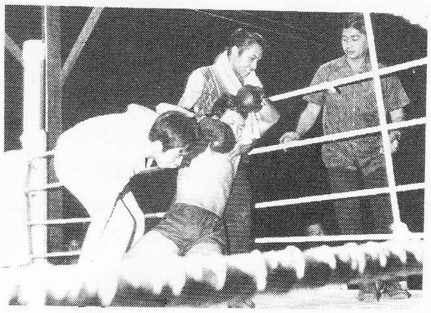
Although a move to amend the revenue law has been introduced, a boxer's ring earnings are still tax-free. But his winnings are not entirely his own. Depending on individual arrangements, between 20 and 30 percent will go to his manager or teacher. In case of injuries in the ring, the stadium is responsible for medical treatment until a boxer can return to his camp, which will then bear the cost for any further care, if necessary. The expenses involved in a ring death will also be carried by the camp, which takes care of the traditional ceremonies and cremation rites.

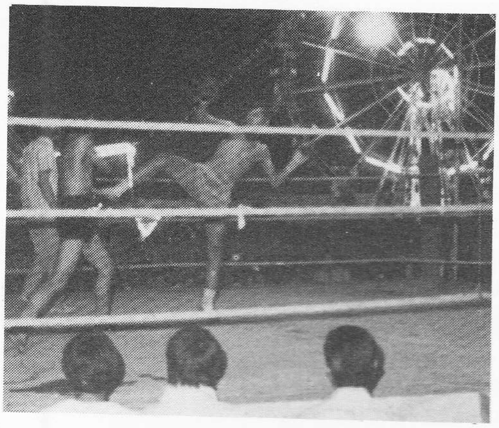
Sometimes, and especially in smaller stadia, boxers will agree to fight for a share of the gate takings, which can vary from under a thousand baht to over one million for a top program in the capital. Provincial arenas, of course, never reach this figure. The Chiang Mai stadium in northern Thailand, for instance, registered its highest takings, 154,000 baht, on a sold-out night in June, 1975. Fighters, having arranged to accept a cut of the takings, get paid after the promoter has taken about one-third of the net proceeds, which means after entertainment tax and expenses have been deducted. The rest is distributed among the boxers, each receiving his share according to rank and his night's performance.

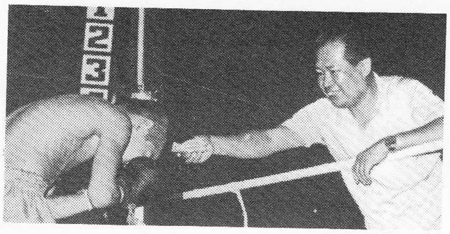




A ring fight is a requirement to complete physical education courses, for those studying muay thai. This marks the only time a boxer receives a diploma instead of money. The fight is for real all the same (above). Among the ten best-equipped boxing camps in Bangkok is the Barbos layout (above right). The ring doctor (right) moves to treat an injured fighter. Boxers don't pay for the medical treatment; that's the responsibility of either stadium, promoter or camp.







Every fun fair has its muay-thai stage where bouts can be seen for as little as five baht (left). Youngsters like this 16-year-old in a gawn welah (before time) bout fight for dermpun, the gambling money. The winner is paid right after the fight, in this case 5000 baht ($250).

Admission prices at Muay-Thai matches can be as cheap as five baht, if one chances upon a country fair, which is never without a boxing ring. Provincial stadia usually charge from 20 to 100 baht, while a ring-side seat in the Bangkok arenas can go up to 500 baht. The highest priced tickets ever sold were the front-line seats at 1000 baht during an international-style world championship bout in July, 1975 in Bangkok, which was supported by ten top Muay-Thai matches.

A capable fighter's purse is sometimes supplemented by a gambling system known as "dermpun." The two opposing camps, each confident of a victory, deposit an equal amount of money with a ring official before the fight. Many of a boxer's followers participate in this form of wager and chip in with small amounts, to make up the sum agreed upon. The winner will take all, the loser gets nothing. After the winning fighter has received his cut, the winnings are paid out to those having taken part in the game. The highest dermpun ever staked was two million baht for a bout staged in Buri Ram Province, eastern Thailand, during 1974.

It is a matter of speculation whether it's horse racing or Muay-Thai, that draws the biggest crowds of gamblers, but no Thai boxing match is ever without them. Bookies walk among the spectators, shouting their odds. Many gamblers ignore the official "tote" and bet among themselves, calling to each other, sometimes right across the stadium. Frequently one can observe someone elbowing his way to the ring-side, trying to contact a fighter during a break. He hopes to improve his chances by offering the boxer a cut of his winnings, if he can knock out his opponent.

Naturally, Muay-Thai, like any other sport that involves betting,

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has its share of trickery and "fixes," but they are the exception rather than the rule.

Most bouts are fair and on the level. Besides the various forms of deception known in international boxing, Thais have been known to use the aid of a witch doctor to weaken an opponent, usually when large sums of money were at stake. The practice of "slipping a mickey" has become rare, and if found out, carries heavy penalties.

An often tried means of earning easy money is the not very sporty trick of faking defeat early in the bout. This is normally a boxer's own decision and he has to be extremely clever to get away with it. If exposed, he will lose his purse and face a ring suspension. In up-country arenas it is quite popular for commercial firms or businessmen to donate presents to the winner of an important bout, or "the best fighter of the night." In some instances these donations exceed a fighter's purse in value.

A number of amusement centers and restaurants, mainly catering to tourists, employ boxers regularly for exhibition bouts, which are, more often than not, a complete farce. Usually it is the mediocre fighter, without much hope of success in the ring, who

Gambler's corner at an up-country arena has lots of action.

makes a comfortable living here. He is admired by his colleagues for his ability to make easy money, but as a fighter he rates zero.

## WOMEN IN THE ART

While Thailand's fighting girls, especially those in remote areas, have been known to train with the boys in some backyard, for as long as anyone can remember, no female is ever allowed to enter a Muay-Thai ring. It would be a sign of ill omen and certainly bring bad luck. According to tradition, a woman's aura upsets the ring atmosphere which would distract a fighter's attention. Sometimes a beauty queen or female dignitary is asked to present a trophy or award, but she is not allowed to mount the three or four steps leading to the fight platform. The lucky victor will either have to leave the ring or lean through the ropes in order to receive his prize. One can even find fanatics, who, could they have their way, would ban women from occupying a ringside seat.

But this does not mean that girls don't fight. In established stadia the young amazons get their own stage whenever female bouts are on the program. In villages and temple fairs, however, the girls did use the all-male sanctuary. Inquiries revealed that the stage was temporary and would be broken down the next day. The young ladies, however, still had to wait until all male contests were over before being allowed to climb through the sacred ropes.

Until not too long ago it was quite difficult to find the female fighters. They hardly ever appeared in or near the capitol. It was a

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Chamras Sakbanchong (left) came back from this kick in the mid-section to knock out her opponent in the 112-pound weight limit class. The stadium was packed to capacity with women out to see this match. Lamduan Pangyachimyom, seen here landing the kick, is a popular favorite on the women's boxing circuit.

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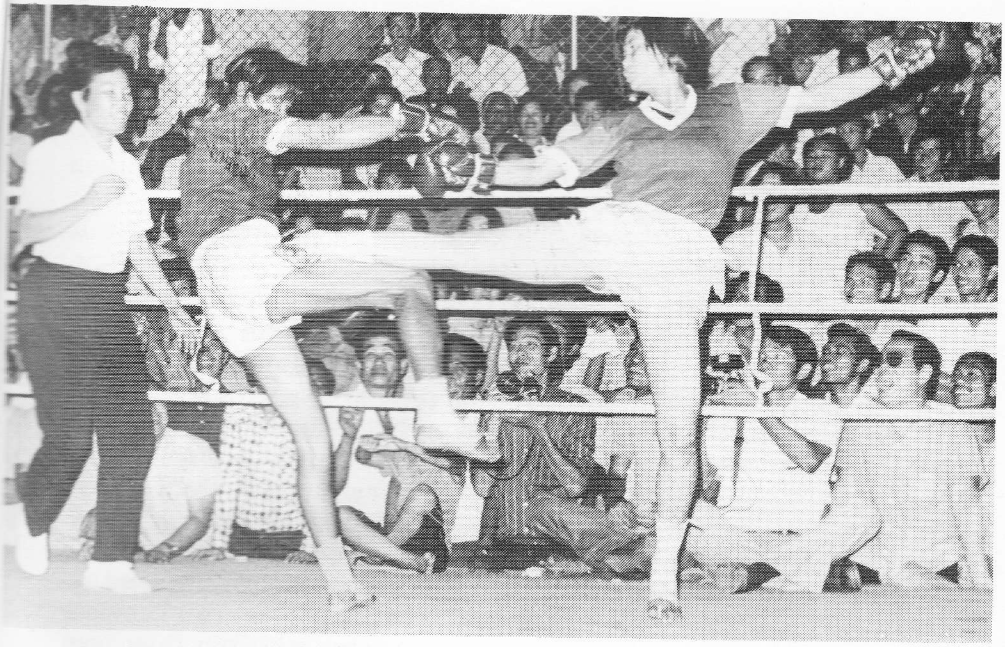

A mixed crowd yells its approval of the well-executed techniques in the women's match (above). Gamblers bet on anything. Here a male fan promises a share of his winnings if the girl beats her opponent.

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matter of luck or the use of an extensive intelligence system, to come across an up-country contest that featured the girls, usually well advertised but only in the immediate vicinity. But all this changed in September 1973, when after the Ali-Norton bout millions of fight fans, still glued to the television screen, were presented with a live transmission of women fighting Thai style, the first ever being televised.

There were five bouts, and two ended in a knock-out. A nationwide controversy started. The arguments in favor included a statement by promoter Thiemboon Intrabut, that, in view of the general shortage of job vacancies for women, making an honorable living in the ring was preferable to becoming a prostitute. Surprisingly some of those calling the fighting girls unladylike were women who had strongly voiced their support for the Women's Liberation Movement on previous occasions. Their main objections were that girls slugging it out in a ring was against Thai tradition and culture and a disgrace to Thai womanhood in general.

However, the girls won the game. The publicity given the issue resulted in numerous fight-happy lasses joining boxing camps. Fights were staged in Bangkok and provincial towns and during 1974 a team of nine girls went on a six months tour of Japan to fight their counterparts in kickboxing, and promote Muay-Thai for women. They fight under the same rules as the men, use the same techniques and wear an identical outfit with the addition of a T-shirt and a specially designed brassiere as a breast protector.

To be sure, most fight fans treat the amazons as a joke. Nobody seems to take them seriously, except the girls themselves and of course the promoters who cash in on the novelty. But there are a number of ladies involved in the fight game, well-known and respected, though not for their performance in the ring. They are managers, occasionally promoters, and some who run their own boxing camps. Perhaps the best known of the latter is Angun Iampinyo, the 58-year-old owner and manager of the Sidhiran Boxing Camp. She has been in the fight business since 1942 and has produced one of the best modern Muay-Thai fighters, Apidet Sidhiran, who retired from the ring in the early seventies.

But women in Muay-Thai are only a very small fraction in the vast setup. Even the fighting girls fad is going downhill again. It is still very much a man's game.

## TRADITIONAL RITES AND CUSTOMS

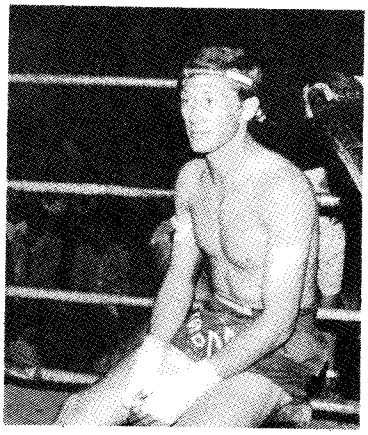
Before a young man is allowed to join a boxing camp, he has to be accepted by his prospective teacher. Should there by any doubt about the youngster's suitability or character he will be rejected or asked to apply again after some time. An interesting example is the case of Dale Kvalheim of Wenatchee, Washington, who, while stationed with the US Army in northeastern Thailand, decided to join a Muay-Thai camp. He was denied entrance with the explanation that Americans lack discipline, have no regard for tradition and would not understand the rituals.

The reasons given were all morally motivated. Dale's physical condition and his desire to learn the art were of no importance. However, two weeks of daily visits to the camp and lengthy conversations convinced the teacher that the young GI was genuinely interested and Dale was accepted as a student. There are a number of modern instructors, mainly in Bangkok, who have relaxed their attitude toward newcomers, but most teachers in the provinces adhere strictly to this tradition.

Once a new student is accepted, the "wai kruh" or "khuen kruh" ceremony, an important entrance ritual, must be performed. Even modern physical education colleges insist on this practice for those students taking a course in Muay-Thai. The general procedure is similar in camps throughout the country, although many teachers have introduced slight variations to suit their own sentiment.

The most important part of the "khuen kruh," which is held in front of a Buddhist shrine, flanked on either side by Muay-Thai equipment, is the vow of loyalty. After the students have made their offerings of flowers, a piece of white cloth, joss sticks, candles and perhaps a few coins or small presents, they pray, before reciting their pledge:

"We have come today to worship the teacher and solemnly promise to be your honest disciples. We respect you and have complete trust in you. We will treasure all traditions, rules and everything we will learn from you. We will make your style and techniques our own. We will never think, say or do anything that could harm the reputation of the teacher, camp or our mates. We swear that our words are honest and to be kept forever. Earth, heaven and the four directions are our witnesses. We beg you to protect us, always. With our bodies, our souls and our words, we surrender to you and obey you as your disciples with the highest respect. Thus, we beg you to teach us everything you know, to



Dale Kvalheim was originally rejected as a muay-thai student because he is an American. But his persistence paid off. Now, he competes.

help us to succeed, to protect us from dangers and bless us with love and happiness, forever."

The recital is followed by a period of meditation, Buddhist rituals and chants and a talk by the master of ceremonies and the teacher. The students are now part of a boxing family, consider the teacher equal to their father and cannot change stables without permission.

Once ready for his first fight, the young boxer is given a ring name. The teacher has observed the novice and chooses a name in line with the boxer's characteristics or personal peculiarities. The surname is, like that of his stablemates, the name of the camp. Some of the ring names are: Singnum Pettanin, meaning Young Lion of the Pettanin camp, or Khunsoek Kaisuadam, the Great Warrior of the Black Panther camp. Should a fighter lose too often, or be otherwise unlucky, his name is considered ill-chosen or betwitched. His teacher will meditate on this and sometimes with the aid of an astrologer, choose a more auspicious title for his ward.

One can still find active ring fighters at the age of 30 or over, but the majority of boxers hang up their gloves in their late twenties, or in case they are married, even earlier. A family man in the ring is a rare sight, usually dictated by economic necessity. He knows that he is the underdog and will probably lose the fight. This is based on the local belief that a man, once in the clutches of a woman, will never be the same again. She saps his strength and takes his mind off the job at hand. This superstition puts a married boxer at a disadvantage and he keeps on losing, though there are exceptions.

An important part of Muay-Thai is the prefight ritual, a slow-motion, ballet-like set of steps and motions, often ridiculed by foreigners, ignorant of its significance. It is accompanied by music and starts with the "wai kruh" or obeisance to the teacher. The boxer kneels in the ring facing the direction of his camp, home or birthplace. He covers his eyes with his gloves and says a short prayer while three times bowing low until his gloves touch the canvas. Now the "ram muay," or boxing dance follows. It is performed in many different ways, each teacher having his own varieties which he gives to a boxer according to his proficiency and experience.

A contestant might slowly walk around the ring, his hand sliding along the top rope. He looks viciously at the crowds, much

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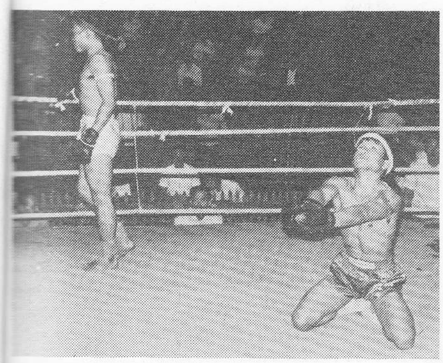
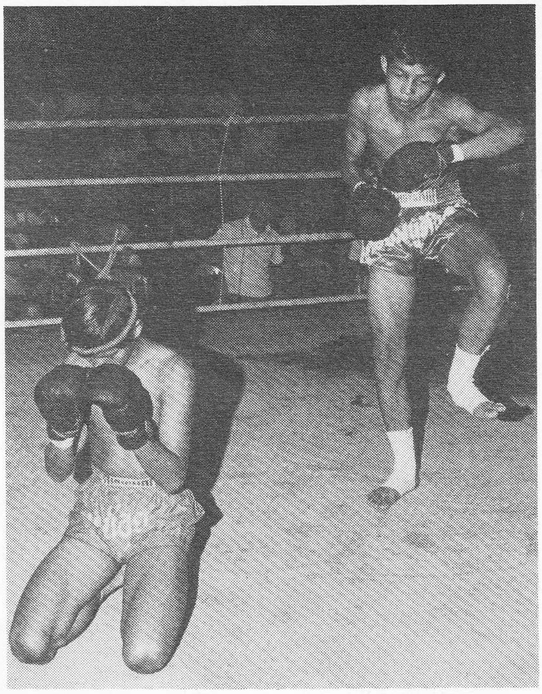




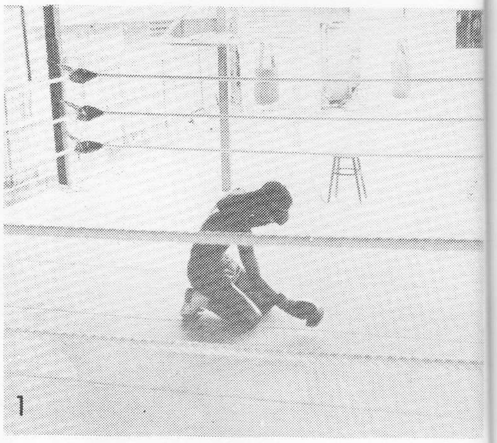
The ram muay boxer on the left walks around the ring to ward off evil spirits while his opponent implores higher powers to come to his aid. Both fighters wear the kruang rang on the left arm and the mongkon (above). Nervously going through the pre-fight ritual are these novices (right) who have just received their ring names. Boxer kneeling is still performing the wai kuruh. His opponent has already started the ram muay.

like the "bad guy" in professional wrestling. But he has nothing against the spectators. His furious expression is meant to keep evil spirits away. At each corner he stops, lowers his head onto the ropes and stomps his foot a few times. Now his aura fills the ring. No corner will provide refuge for his opponent.

Another fighter kneels on his right knee, right foot raised high, keeping balance with the toes of his extended left foot. He starts a swimming or flying motion with his arms while rocking forwards and back. He jumps up and fights an imaginary opponent, slow-motion-style, into each of the four corners.

The "ram muay" also serves as a prefight warm-up exercise and can last as long as five minutes. Its performance is accompanied by silent prayers and the recitation of magic formulae. Some of the higher forms of these dances are difficult to perform and earn a boxer extended applause if well executed. For those with an intimate knowledge of "ram muay," details of the dance easily reveal the identity of the performer's teacher or camp. The series of photographs will give an idea of what the "ram muay" looks like, but it would be futile to give a step-by-step description. Without initiation and the knowledge of the secret words, jealously guarded by each boxer, its performance is quite useless.

This set of 23 pictures is a sequence of one of the many forms of "ram muay."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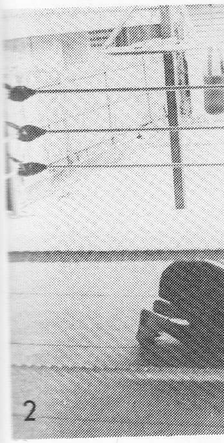
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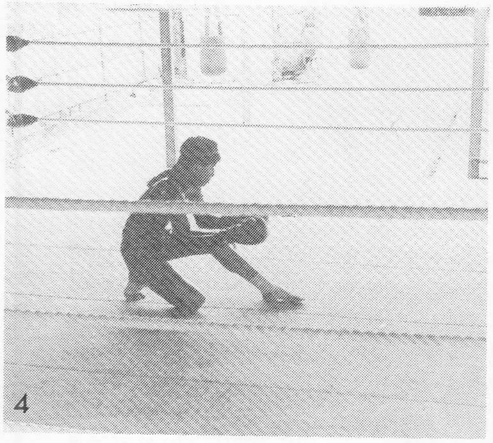
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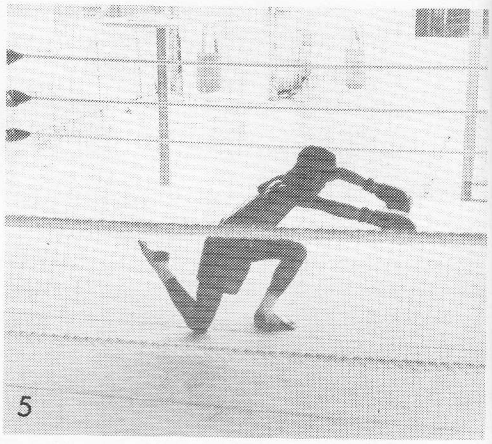
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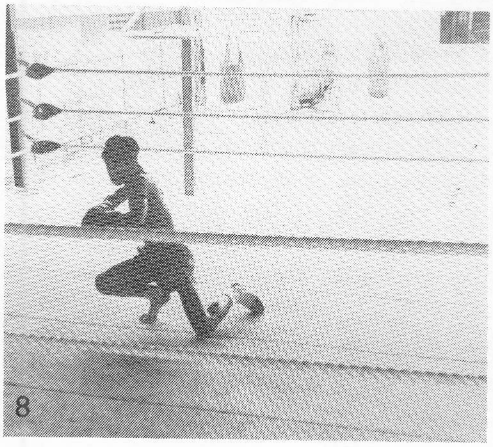
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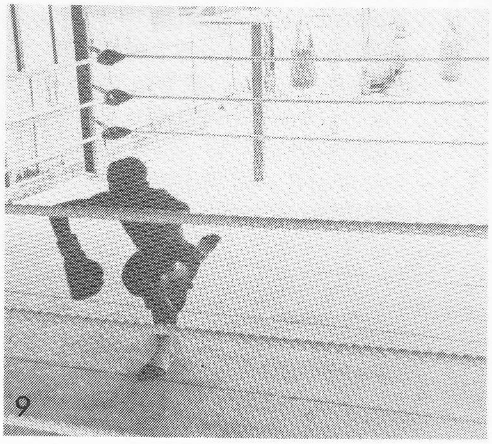
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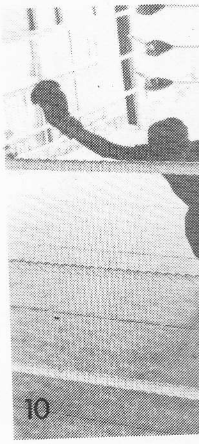
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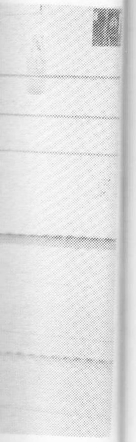

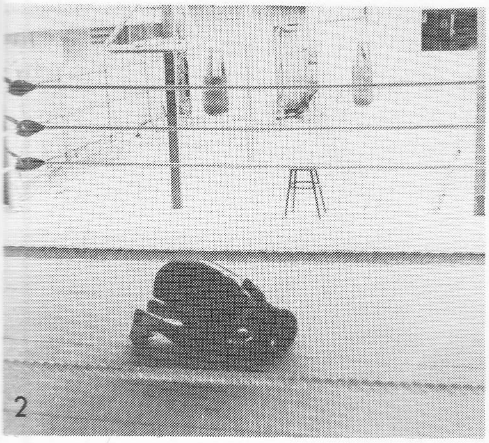

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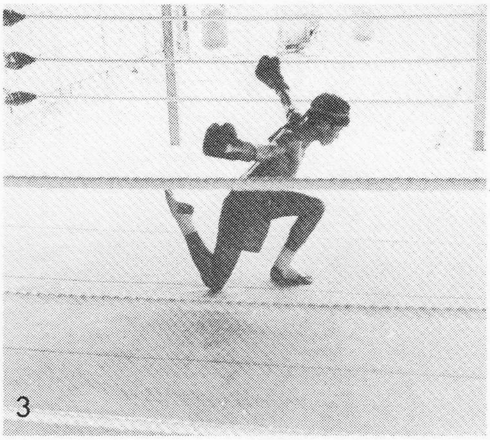

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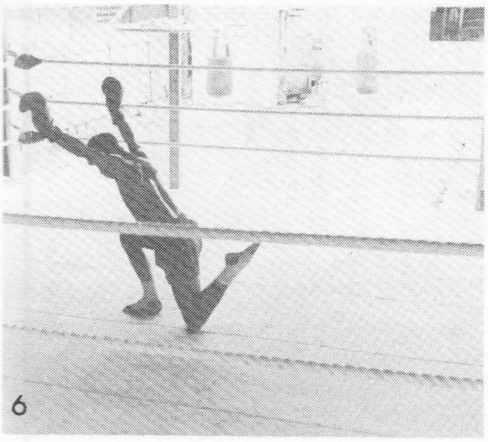

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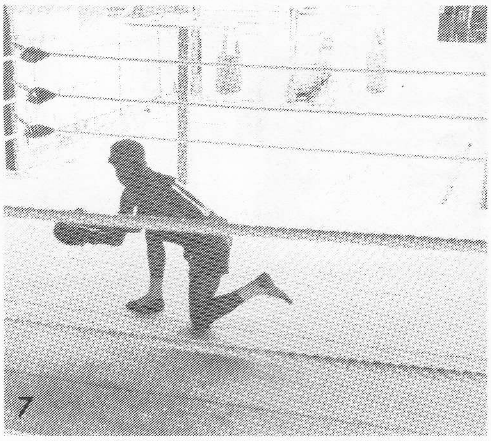

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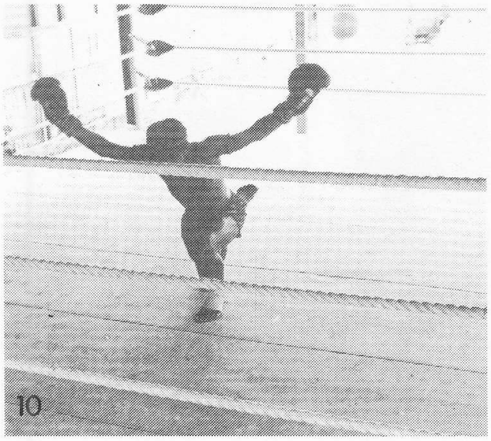

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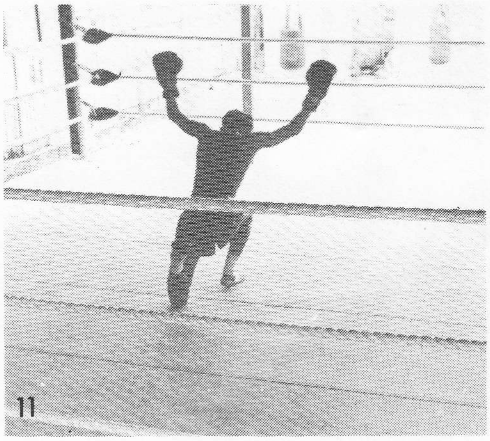

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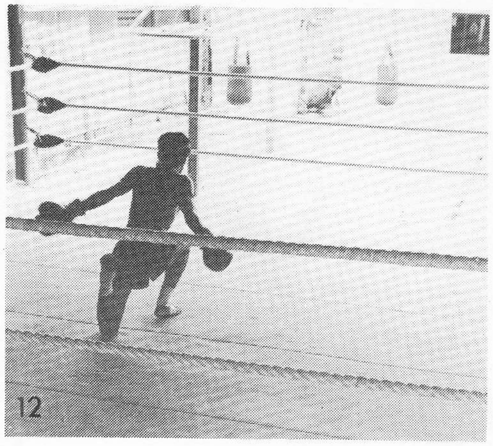
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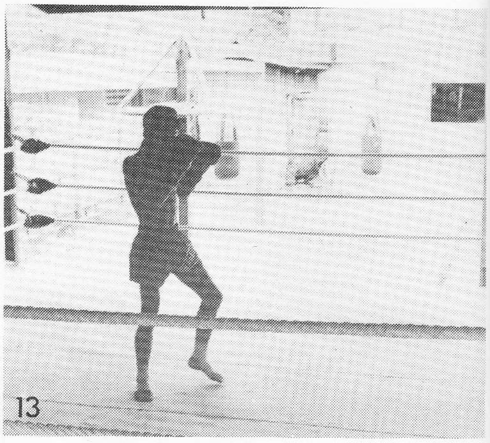
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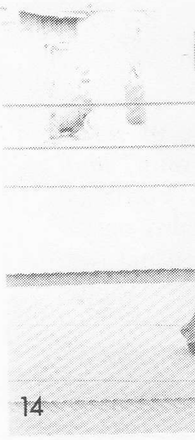
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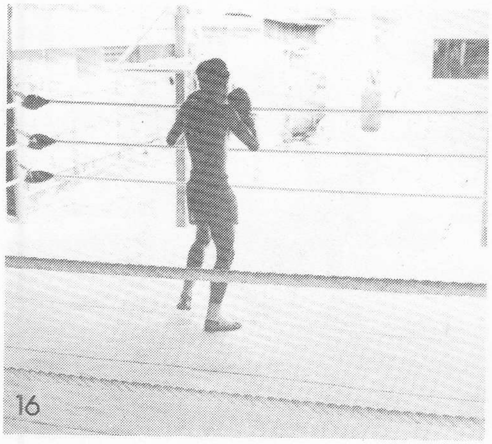
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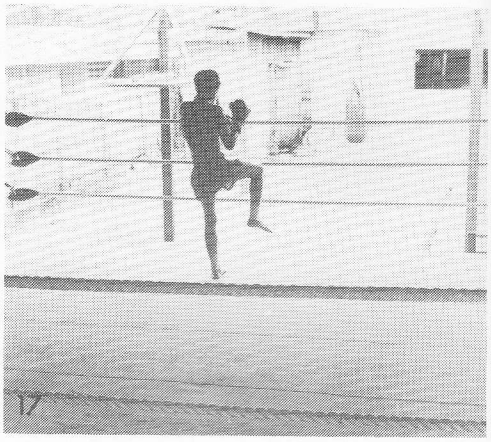
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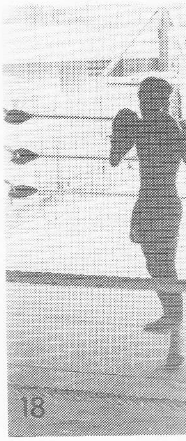
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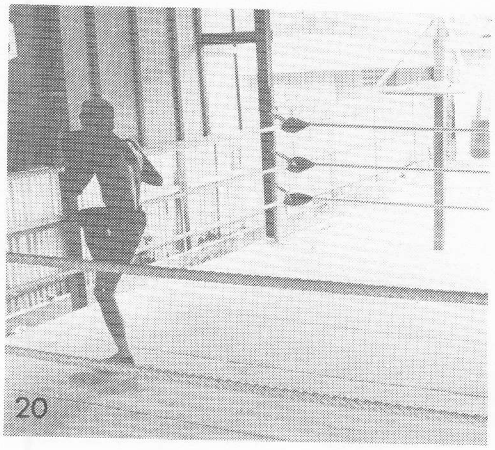
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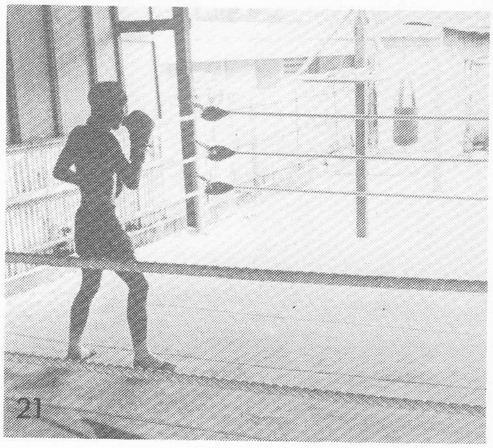
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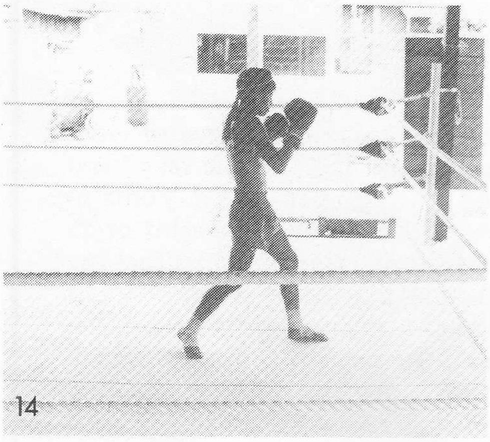
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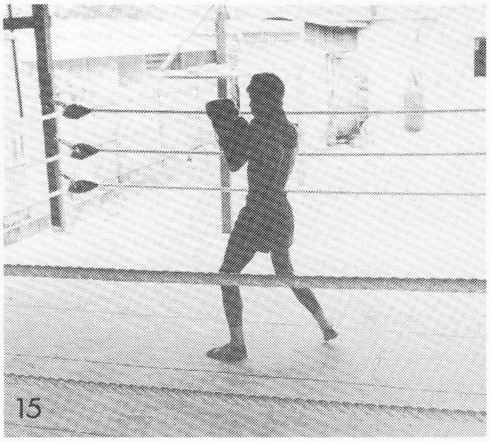
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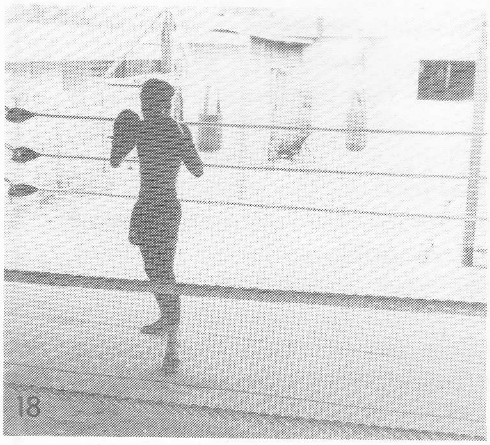
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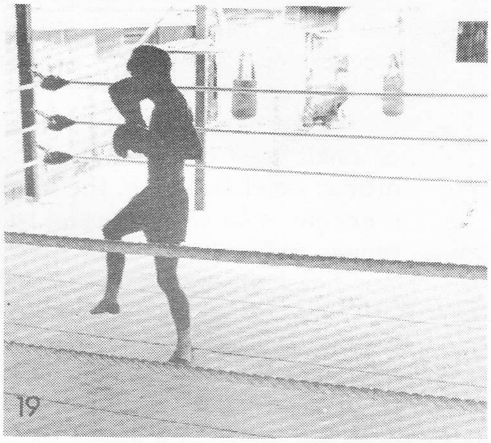
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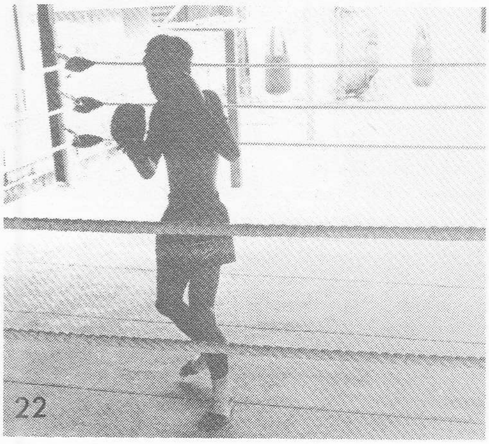
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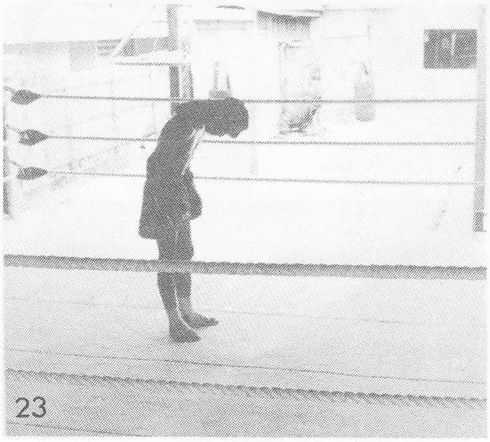
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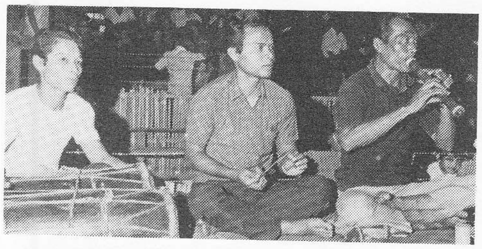
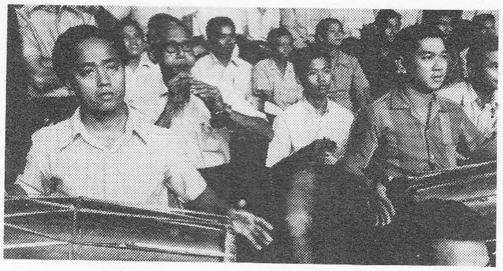
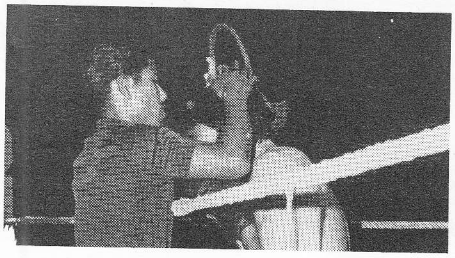
One can often see a boxer wearing a string or piece of cloth around one or both biceps. This is called the "kruang rang" and may be worn throughout the fight. Sometimes it contains protective charms, a small picture of the Buddha or a saint or an herb said to have magic properties. During the prefight ritual the fighters also wear the "mongkon" or crown, a cord about finger-thick and worn around the head. It does not belong to the fighter but is the property of the teacher and considered sacred. After the completion of the "ram muay" and before the first round commences, the trainer or a handler bows with folded hands, says a short prayer, and lifts the "mongkon" off the boxer's head, blowing on his hair for good luck.

A very important part of Muay-Thai bouts is the music, which not only accompanies the fight itself, but also the prefight ceremonies. The haunting sounds are heard far beyond the confines of a stadium. The "wong muay," as the four-piece band is called, consists of a reedy-sounding Jawa flute, the Pi'chawa, a pair of small brass cymbals known as Ching, and the Glong Kaek, two drums, one being high, the other low pitched. The musicians know every move in the game and watch the fighters constantly, varying tempo and volume from slow and soothing to speedy and loud, depending on the action in the ring.

There are a number of further traditions to which the fight community adheres, though they are not necessarily peculiar to Muay-Thai but rather part of the Thai's lifestyle and the Buddhist religion.







Musicians watch closely and change the mood music to suit the action in the ring. The ensemble (wong muay) consists of the pi'chawa, ching and klong kaek. The mongkon is lifted before the fight and the trainer blows on the boxer's head for good luck (lower left).

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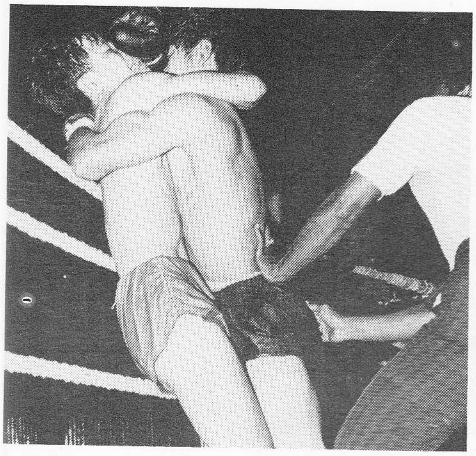
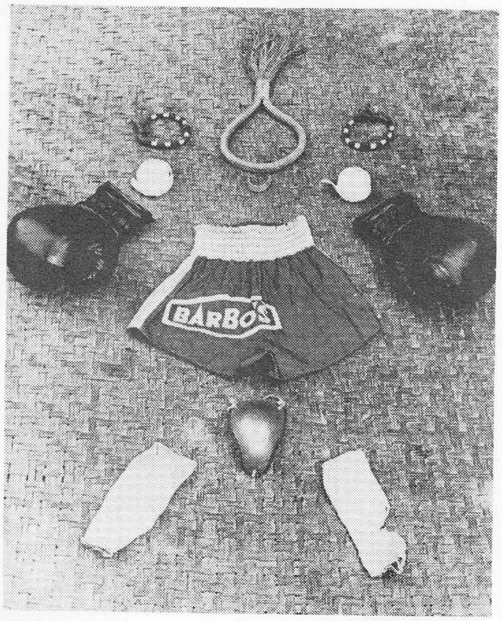




A fighter's kit has anklets, groin guard, red or blue trunks, gloves, bandages, one or two armbands (kruang rang), mouth guard or gum shield and the mongkon, worn only during pre-fight ritual (right). Although a well-regulated sport, muay-thai appears to be an anything-goes affair (above).

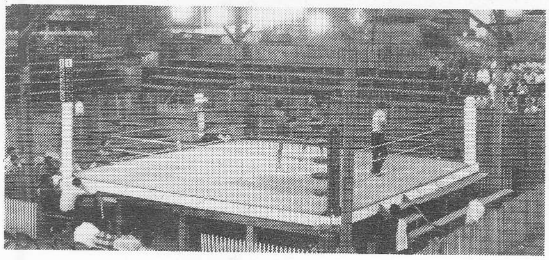
## OUTFIT, RULES AND REGULATIONS

To the uninitiated it looks like an anything-goes free-for-all. Often a fight results in one or both boxers being covered with blood and many a bout is decided before the end of the first round. Yet Muay-Thai is a well-regulated sport and follows a strict code of ethics. The same rules apply throughout the country.

The contestant wears either a red or blue pair of trunks, under which he has tied the krajab, an aluminium cup designed to protect the genitals. A pair of anklets covers insteps and lower shins. Thai fighters do not forge their hands. They are allowed a total of six feet of one-inch-wide bandage plus 12 inches of one-half-inch-wide tape to wrap both hands. For some reason this rule never seems to be enforced. Most boxers appear to use at least twice the lengths permitted and get away with it. Ring gloves weigh six ounces but the eight ounce variety is allowed and sometimes used. A mouth guard may be worn but is not obligatory as is the "kruang rang" described earlier. Thai fighters oil their bodies with a pungent smelling ointment, called "nam man muay" or boxing oil. Its application is legal but may not be excessive.

Muay-Thai bouts are held in the following weight categories:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Junior Flyweight | — | not | exceeding | 108 | pounds |
| Flyweight | — | ” | ” | 112 | ” |
| Bantamweight | — | ” | ” | 118 | ” |
| Junior Featherweight | — | ” | ” | 122 | ” |
| Featherweight | — | ” | ” | 126 | ” |
| Junior Lightweight | — | ” | ” | 130 | ” |
| Lightweight | — | ” | ” | 135 | ” |
| Junior Welterweight | — | ” | ” | 140 | ” |
| Welterweight | — | ” | ” | 147 | ” |
| Middleweight | — | ” | ” | 160 | ” |



Muay-Thai ring in provincial stadium. Near post is blue, far, red, neutral corners, white. Lighted digit on left post is round's number. Spirit shrine, a must in every stadium, is left of red post. Scene is typical of novices trying their luck before main fights.

In theory the heavier weight divisions do exist, but have no participants.

Muay-Thai contests are held on a platform, raised three to four feet off the ground and in a roped-in square of which one side is to be not less than 16 feet and not more than 20 feet long. The square is bordered by at least three ropes of no less than three-quarter-inch thickness and covered with either cloth or leather, stressed in a straight line, running horizontally and parallel to the ring floor at two, three and four foot heights from ring level. The edge of the ring floor is to extend to no less than two feet from the outside of the ropes. The ring floor is to be covered with any soft material, not more than one-and-one-half-inches thick, which again is covered with one layer of tightly stressed canvas.

The above is a translation of the rules established in 1937 and used by all official stadia. Some village arenas and fun fair platforms however, if judged by the specifications, could hardly be called a ring. Typically in Muay-Thai are the two diagonally opposite ring posts, one painted red, the other blue. They mark the contestants' corners and are matched by the color of a boxer's trunks. Red is usually given to the favorite.

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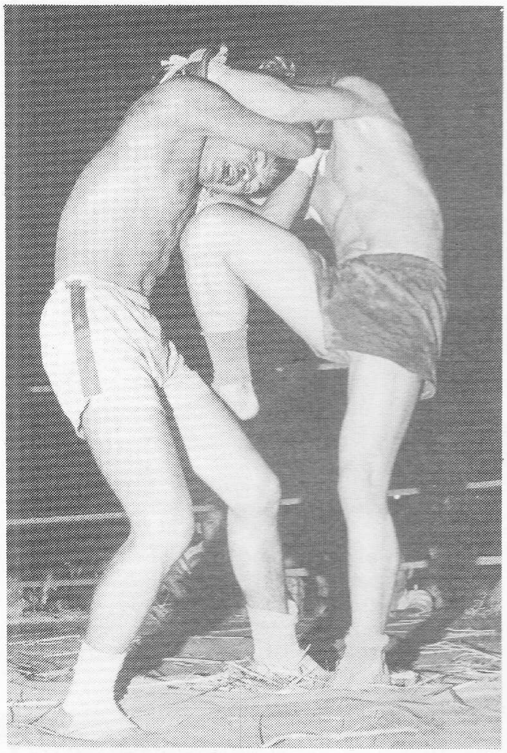

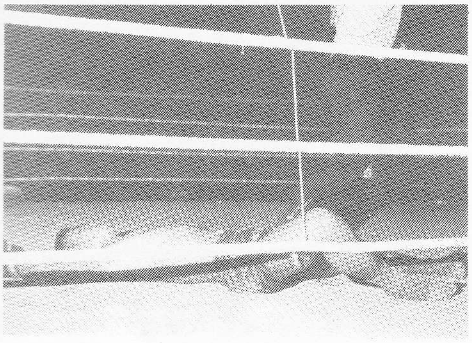

The temporary makeshift arena hardly deserves the name "ring." But with straw on the floor, the action is no less intense (left). . . . 8, 9, 10—knockout (above) is not an uncommon happening in any ring.

A bout consists of five rounds of three minutes duration with two-minute breaks, controlled by a timekeeper. A referee in the ring and two side judges each keep a score card. Decisions are arrived at by:

1. A knockout, when a boxer is unable to continue after a count of ten, or, in case of having been knocked out of the ring, cannot get back unaided by the end of the count.
2. A technical knockout, when a fighter is not fit to continue at the start of a new round, when the ring doctor stops a bout because of an injury, when the referee halts a fight to prevent an obvious loser from taking any more unnecessary punishment and "throwing in the towel."
3. The awarding of points. The winner of a round gets five full points, while half-point subtractions are going to the loser according to his performance. In case of a draw, both contestants will receive five points. The three score cards are tallied and the boxer with the highest number of points wins the bout.

A "no contest" is declared when a fighter shows poor technique or lacks fighting spirit. This decision carries a ring suspension and

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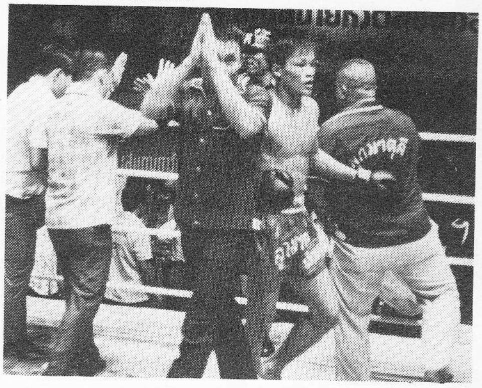

Voice of the Nation

All's fair as a kung-fu artist strikes the back of the kick-boxer (above). MP's preserve order in the ring after an unpopular decision (above left) and in the crowd of gamblers (below left).

the loss of a boxer's purse. This rule has been introduced to discourage fighters from entering a contest for quick and easy money without being able to give a satisfactory performance. In Muay-Thai, a referee's decision is final and neither the judges, nor anyone else, has the right to dispute the result.

During the bout any part of the body may be attacked. Prohibitions include hip and shoulder throws, head-butting, choking and strangling, locks, biting, spitting, hair pulling, holding onto ropes and attacking an opponent while down. According to the old-timers, many of these "techniques, refined to a high art," were formerly not only permitted but also used extensively. Needless to say, in the heat of the battle, rules are not always remembered and it sometimes takes a referee as tough as the fighters themselves, to keep the action "clean." Curiously, no rule prevents a boxer from attacking the referee, but in general, unless it happens accidentally, respect for authority prevents a fighter from taking advantage of this oversight.

A referee's vocabulary during a round consists of only three words, provided he doesn't have to give a warning. "Chock" (fight), "yaek" (break) and "yood" (stop). He will also watch the corners, where a boxer's handlers and stablemates often try to help to win the fight by shouting their advice. Corner coaching is

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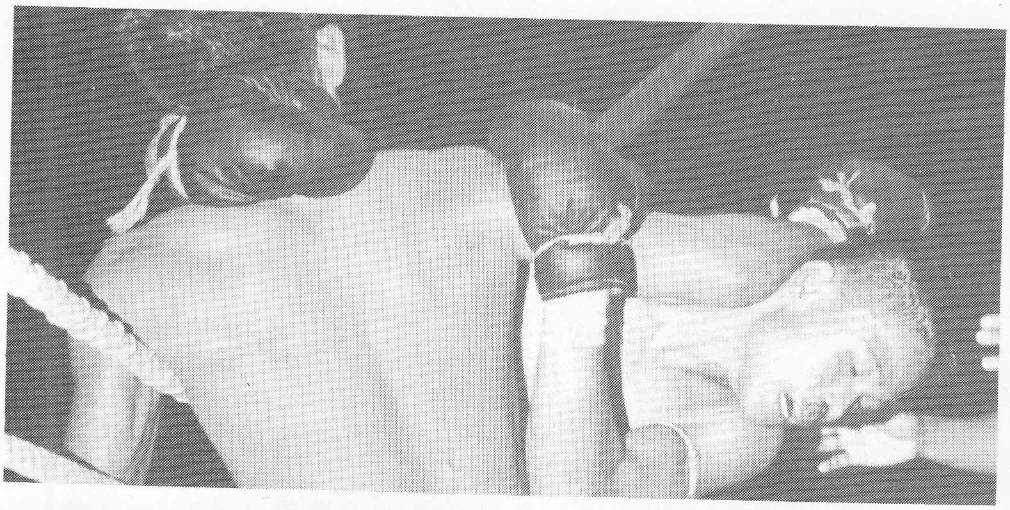
against the rules, often tolerated, but may still result in disqualification if a referee's warning is repeatedly disregarded. A fight may be interrupted when a glove lace comes loose and has to be retied, the "kruang rang" has slipped and needs readjusting or the straps of a groin guard break, a mishap which is corrected outside the ring. The time lost will be added to the regular three minutes.

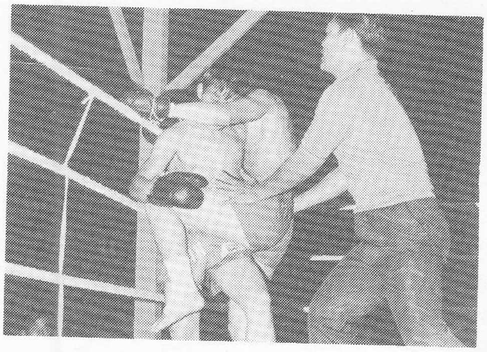
Before the fight a boxer has to go through a medical check and pass an official, normally the referee, who inspects bandages, groin guard and the amount of oil on his body. He is allowed to have two seconds, one of them usually his trainer, who may enter the ring before the bout and during breaks. Officially a Muay-Thai fighter must be 18 years old before he can compete, but again, this rule is often ignored. Especially in the provinces, one can see young boys fighting just as often as their elder brothers, though they will go three rounds instead of the customary five.

## TRAINING

A competing Muay-Thai fighter has to stay in top physical condition throughout the year. He has a schedule of at least one bout a month and cannot afford to be lazy if he wants to stay in the limelight. Training sessions are held daily except on weekends and are strict no-nonsense affairs. Naturally the degree of discipline differs greatly from camp to camp, but in general, trainers follow the same pattern. Boxing teachers are usually hard on their students but not unreasonable.

The more sophisticated gyms are well-equipped, using all the modern training gadgets known in the West, and having a permanent ring. Most training is done in open air in the provincial camps but some have a small roof-covered area for workouts during the rainy season. Essential, and to be found in even the poorest training center, sometimes just a small backyard, are skipping ropes, boxing gloves and a punching bag. In the financially better off stables one can find speed balls, punching balls, bags of different weights, a variety of weight lifting equipment, bag gloves, fighting gloves, heavy training gloves, head protection gear and mirrors to check one's techniques during shadow boxing. Some trainers also use paper balls or small lemons hanging on a piece of string, where novices spend months learning to focus their attacks by punching and kicking the small and moving target. The banana tree, the most important training aid of





"Fight dirty," seems to be the order of the bout in Thailand. Here fighters grab the ropes, the most common foul, often ignored by the judge (above left and below). "Don't try," as referee stops a kick to the fallen fighter (below left).

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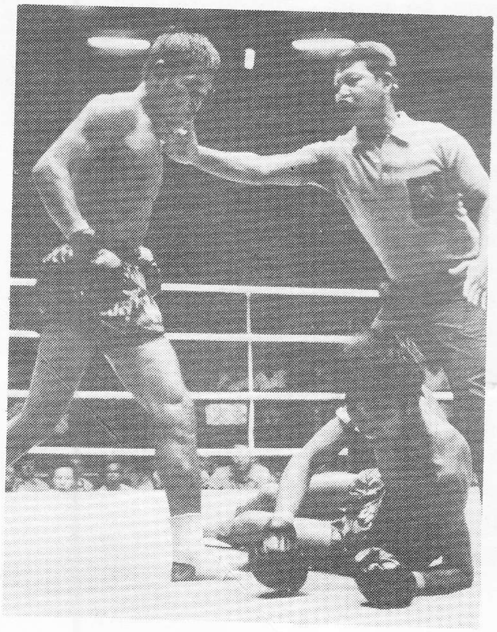

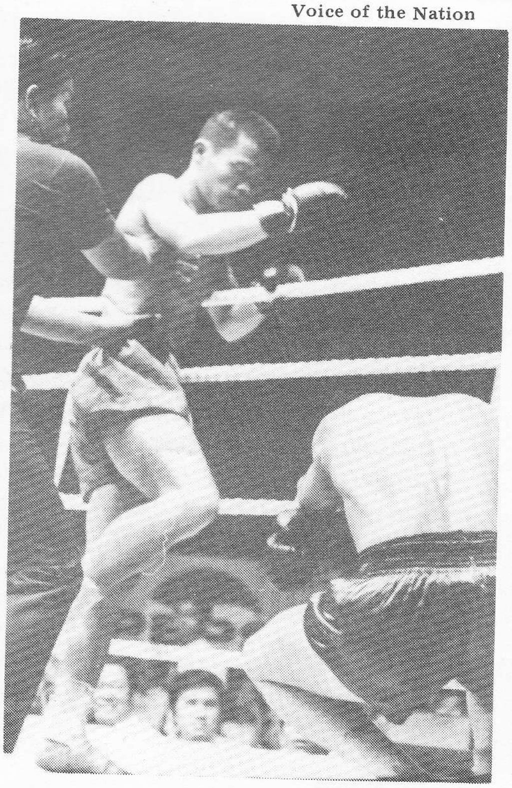

former times, has gone out of fashion. The old-time fighters used to forge their instep and shin by repeatedly kicking against the tree trunk. Some rather difficult training methods consisted of having a three-foot-long piece of trunk standing upright on a level piece of ground and kicking the top part, alternately from the right and left, without letting it fall to the ground. Once mastered, the length of the piece was gradually increased up to five feet. Another way of becoming a kicking expert was to keep a short piece of trunk in the air with a rapid succession of left and right kicks. Since the introduction of the "heavy bag" these methods have disappeared completely.

Training sessions are held in the late afternoon and last from one to three hours. Before the workout, the boxers rub themselves with "nam man muay" and get a massage, which during the week before a bout is quite extensive and lasts up to half an hour.

A typical training schedule will look something like this:

1. Fifteen minutes of rope skipping at different speeds.
2. Shadow boxing for five rounds with one-minute breaks, going through all offensive techniques, using fists, elbows, knees and feet.
3. Bag practice for five rounds with one-minute breaks, using all attacks in a boxer's repertoire.

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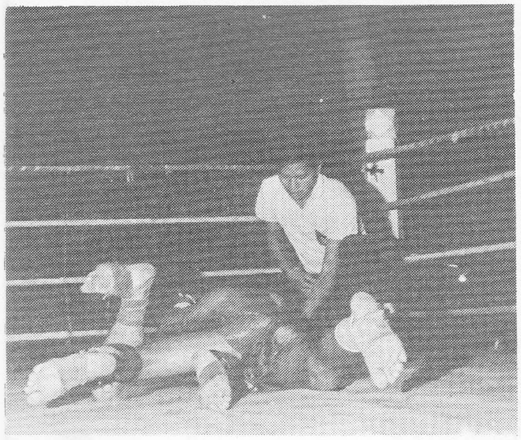
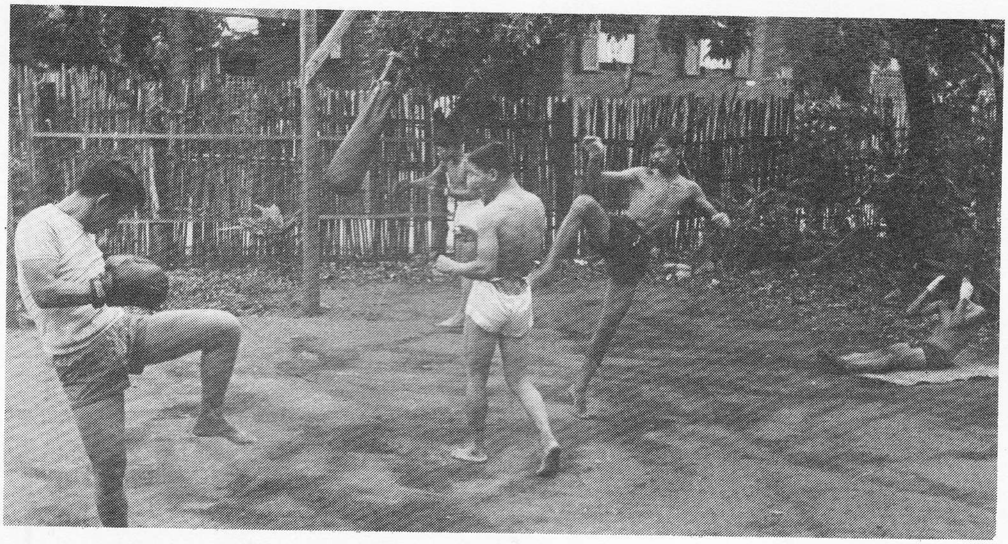
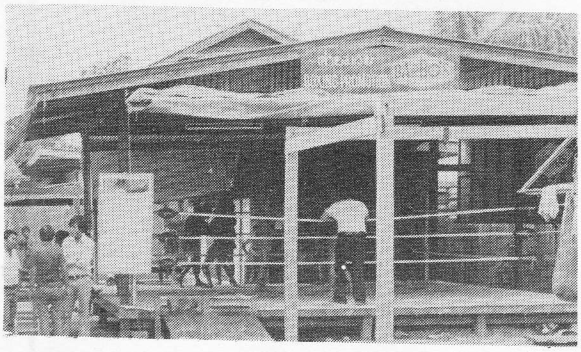
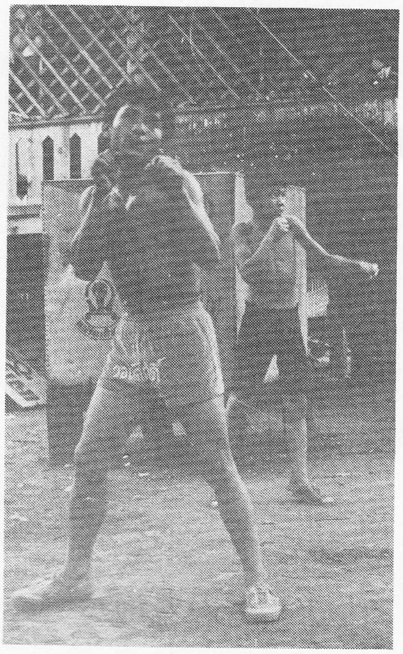
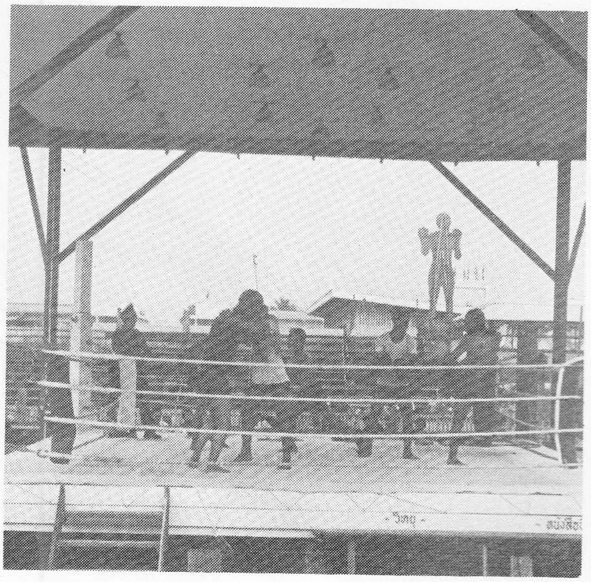


Breaking it up requires more than words from the referee (above left). A kung-fu fighter is kicked while down by an opponent holding the ropes. The rules seem to have been forgotten; or maybe the referee just doesn't care (right).









Training camps range from the up-country type (above) with only a bag to the Bangkok one with a permanent ring (left) to the rented one (below left) where fighters "get the feel of it." Novices punch small paper balls on a string (right) to sharpen their focus.

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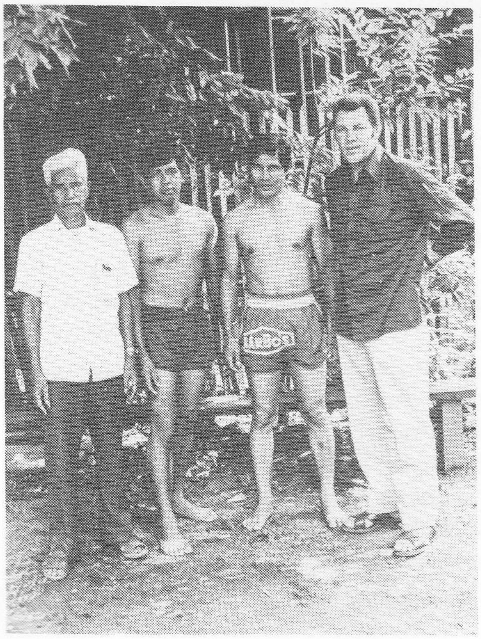
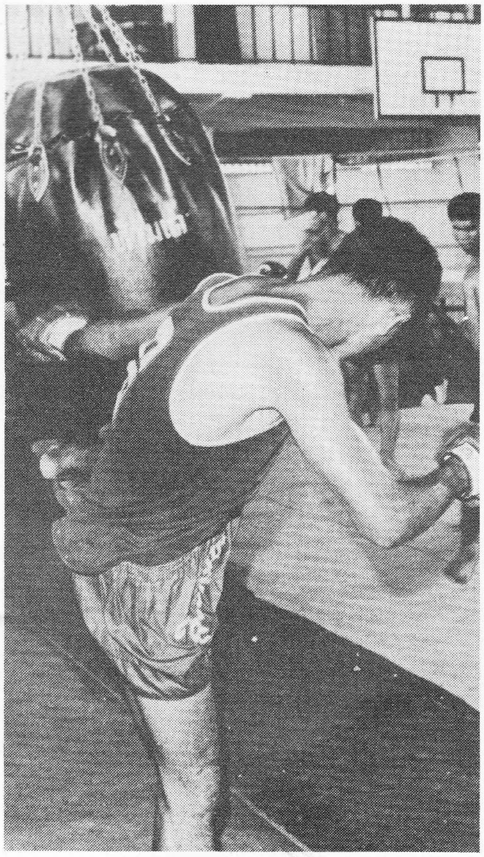
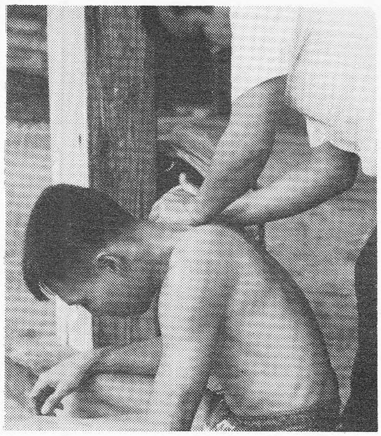
4. Sparring with a partner during which headgear and heavy gloves are worn, again for five rounds. During this session no hard contact with elbows, knees and feet is allowed.
5. Sparring with a senior fighter or trainer who wears specially designed protective pads on his forearms. He uses only defensive moves and directs the attacks of the boxer, who is to react as fast as he can, using any technique he sees fit.
6. General exercises such as push ups, sit ups and light weight training.
7. Roadwork. This is normally done early in the morning and consists of at least one-half hour of jogging and includes five rounds of running at increased speed for three minutes. During the one-minute breaks the runner does not rest but goes on jogging.

The heavy bag (right) substitutes now for the banana tree in kicking practice. Former ring hero Brong Trairot with fighter Singhtamin Sing Prosert, trainer Manusak Barbos and the author. Trairot has one of the largest camps in Chiangmai—over 50 fighters.







During sparring sessions headgear is worn (above). Before a workout a boxer gets a massage (left).

All phases of the workouts are controlled by a stop watch. The last 30 seconds in each three-minute period are announced and all exercises, including running, are executed with maximum speed and power.

The fighters live on a controlled diet suggested by the trainer. Its main ingredients are lean meat, fresh vegetables and plenty of fruit, supplemented by milk, eggs and several locally-made fortified drinks. In case of weight trouble, the trainer will order a rigorous reducing program which includes special massages, increased exercise, sweating and strict control of food intake with a drastic reduction in liquids.

The beginner with average talent will get his first fight after about 40 to 50 training days. He will be matched with a youngster from a friendly rival camp. The first few bouts are considered part of his training and important for a novice in gaining ring experience and getting used to the stadium atmosphere. It also gives the trainer a chance to test the student's fighting spirit.

But physical training is not all in a Muay-Thai fighter's education. At least for those who live in the camp, discipline extends to the non-training hours. They do chores and run errands for their teacher, whose every word is obeyed. The more concerned and knowledgeable instructor also lectures his students on anatomy and the workings of the muscular, nervous, respiratory and digestive systems, and teaches them massage techniques. He gives moral coaching and acts as teacher, doctor, father and brother. In the words of a well-known boxing instructor, a Muay-Thai fighter should be "a boon to society." He should be a good technician, confident, disciplined, quick-witted and brave. He should be a gentleman, patient, helpful and polite, with a good sense of sportsmanship.

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Quite the "superman." It goes without saying that not all trainers have such high ideals. Some consider their students as little more than a body to be made into a fighting machine.

Training and fight directions differ widely. The following is a summary of points used by the majority of instructors:

1. Every attacking move is to be executed with an exhalation. All Thai boxers practice this. While watching a training session one hears the "eesh"-sounding hiss that accompanies every punch, kick, elbow and knee attack, from the beginning until the end.
2. Watch your opponent constantly, but never look into his eyes or at the point you mean to attack. There are instructors who teach fighters to look only into an opponent's eyes and nowhere else.
3. Never neglect your cover while you attack. This point is sadly ignored by many fighters.
4. Never open your mouth or bite your lips or tongue.
5. Always watch your stance and never bring your feet together.
6. Do not tense your muscles until immediately before an attack.
7. Do not expose your chin, neck and armpits unnecessarily.
8. Never face your opponent square on or turn your back toward him.
9. Never try a technique in the ring you have not perfected in training.
10. Do not concentrate on defense but attack before your opponent does.
11. Do not move wildly but concentrate your attack on vital points.
12. If your opponent is taller than you are, concentrate on close-in fighting.
13. If your opponent is known to have a strong right, you have a better chance if you fight him with your left.
14. Always take advantage of your opponent's mistakes.
15. Never show when you are hurt; try to get through the round with clinches.
16. Never listen to audience or fans but follow the advice of your trainer and seconds.

17. Always go slowly at the beginning of a round and speed up toward the end. Many trainers do not agree and advocate various other methods.
18. Always register the point you have attacked and try to evaluate the amount of damage it has done.
19. Remember that a light attack on target is better than a heavy one missed.
20. Never feel superior. Respect your opponent but also know that you can win, whatever his reputation.
21. Remember that a winner of a bout is decided according to rules. It is wrong to beat an opponent with fouls and be disqualified.
22. Try to spar with a partner who is better than you, and never use your full strength.
23. Whether in training or competition, always control your temper.
24. Even in training, always select the gloves that fit you best. Do not spar without wearing anklets, groin guard, mouth protector and head gear.
25. Always ask a friend or senior to watch you in training. By knowing your mistakes you improve more easily.

## BASIC TECHNIQUES

Muay-Thai is said to have 108 basic techniques. This might have been the case in the old days but certainly doesn't hold true today. Some of the older teachers talk of "about sixty major attacking moves," yet even this figure is exaggerated, unless one includes every possible variation of a fundamental action.

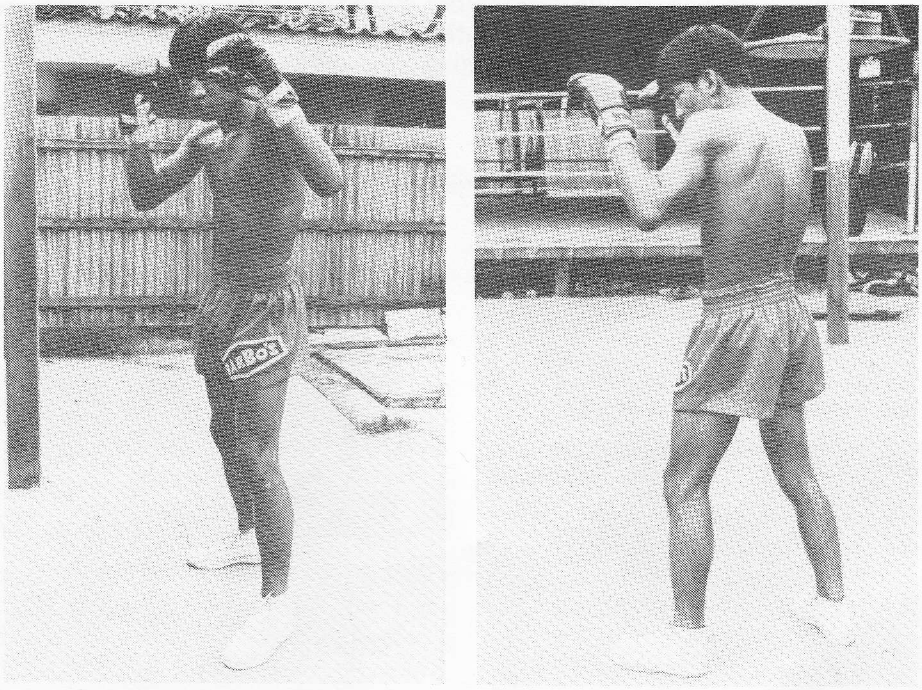
A number of techniques exist in theory only. They are neither seen during training, nor are they ever used in the ring. Muay-Thai today is 100 percent contest-oriented, with the result that some moves, considered perhaps too difficult, dangerous or not very sportsmanlike, have gradually been eliminated. Basically, Muay-Thai employs five different punches, four elbow attacks, three knee kicks and five foot techniques.

In the old days each move was known by a complicated name, quite incomprehensible to a layman, and often in no way related to its function. Today modern terminology is used and even foreign words, mainly borrowed from international boxing terms, have found their way into the fighter's vocabulary.

## POSTURE

A Muay-Thai student's stance, body and arms position is very similar to and probably influenced by the basic posture as it is known in western-style boxing. It has become standard during the last forty or so years throughout the country. Earlier fighters used many different basic body positions, depending on the teacher's individual preference.

Ideally, the feet should be from 22 to 30 inches apart, "according to a boxer's height." Elbows should be held lower than the armpits and gloves should not reach above the head. The distance between fist and head should be at least the width of a glove. The somewhat neglected cover of the lower body parts is most likely due to the complete reliance on the crotch guard, a compulsory part of the fighter's outfit without which he is not allowed in the ring. A kick to the groin, hardly ever intentional, will hurt the attacker a lot more than the receiver.



Front view of basic posture of muay-thai (left). Side/back view of basic posture of muay-thai (right). In both photos note the hand positioning.

## STEPS

The way a Thai boxer moves his feet, has also undergone a considerable transformation since the 1930s. A well-known old-timer explained that in the old days, a fighter always stepped in a "triangular equilibrium," a three-point zig-zag move, "like a boat sailing against the wind." Bodyweight was supported by the balls of the feet only, the feet being kept in a straight line and parallel to each other.

Today's trainers call the old way too slow and in no way applicable to modern fighting styles. Footwork, as practiced in Muay-Thai today, is no longer distinguishable from that in international boxing.

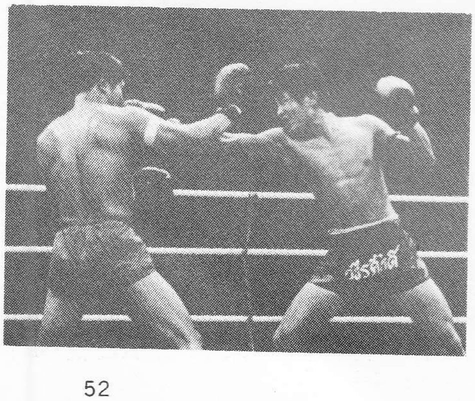
## THE FIST

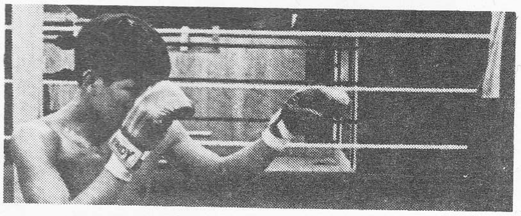
Ever since the introduction of boxing gloves, the hand has been reduced to a punching tool only. With knuckles, finger tips and nails covered, some of the "subtleties" used by early fighters, can no longer be applied. Today Muay-Thai uses the fist in a fashion similar to western-style boxing.

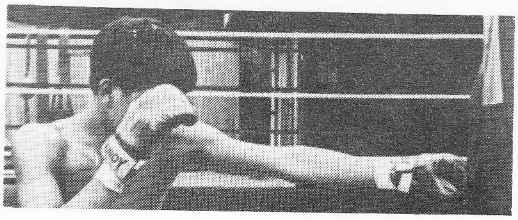
### The Straight Punch

A forward lunge punch, either right or left, but always the side of the forward leg, it is executed with full body force behind it.

The straight punch in practice (right) and in the ring has the full force of the body behind it.

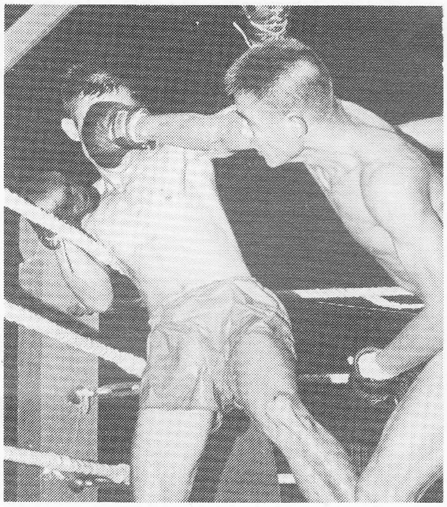


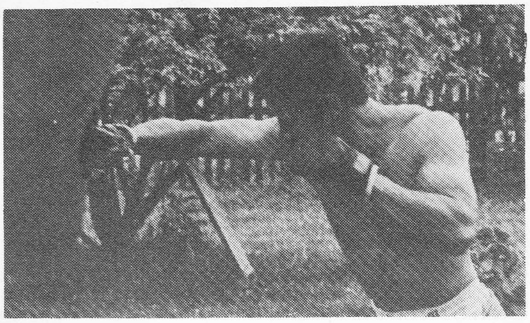




## The Reverse Punch

Technically similar to the straight punch, but always delivered from the same side as the rear leg. Both the straight and reverse punches are the most often-used fist techniques in Muay-Thai.

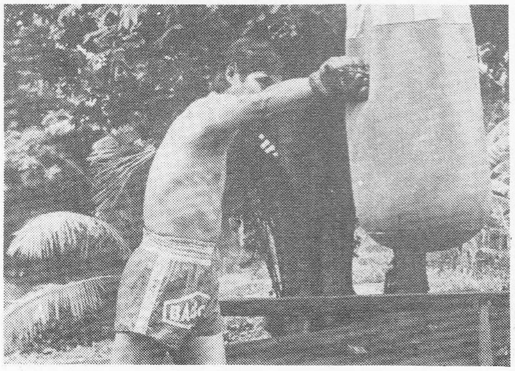




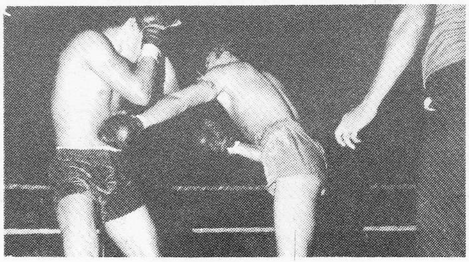
The reverse punch against the bag (above) and against the face are often-used and punishing blows in muay-thai.

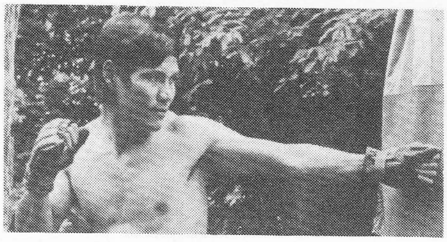
## The Swing

In theory the swing is used from the side, to the rear, overhead and upwards, but the two latter versions are hardly ever employed. It is normally executed with a fully extended arm, accompanied by a body twist or rotation.

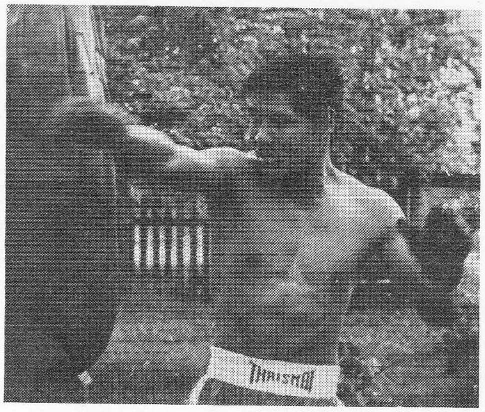


With a twist of the body the swing lands against the bag or the opponent.



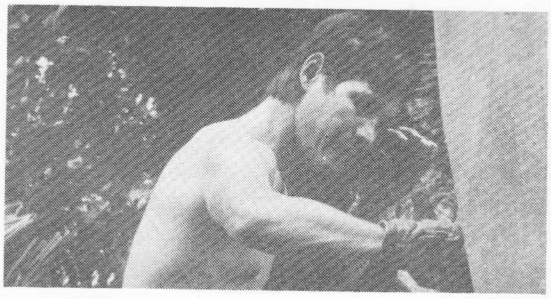


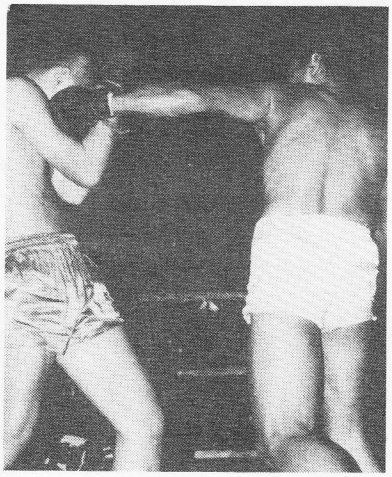
Back swings use the back of the hand (above) and the edge of the fist (right). This is also called the hammer fist.

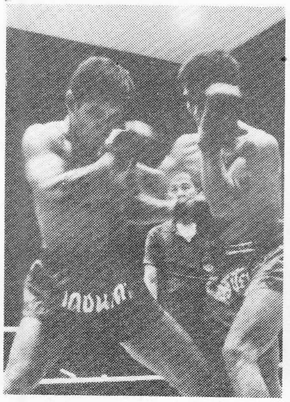


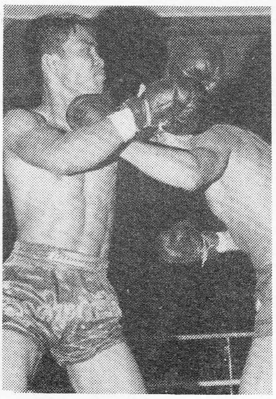
## The Jab, Hook and Uppercut

All three techniques are almost certainly borrowed from international boxing. They are the source of many arguments among technicians, trying to find the reason why so few Thai boxers have become experts in their use. The jab and hook are not often employed and need considerable improvement, while the uppercut is very popular and a frequently used counterattack technique when threatened by one of the knee kicks.

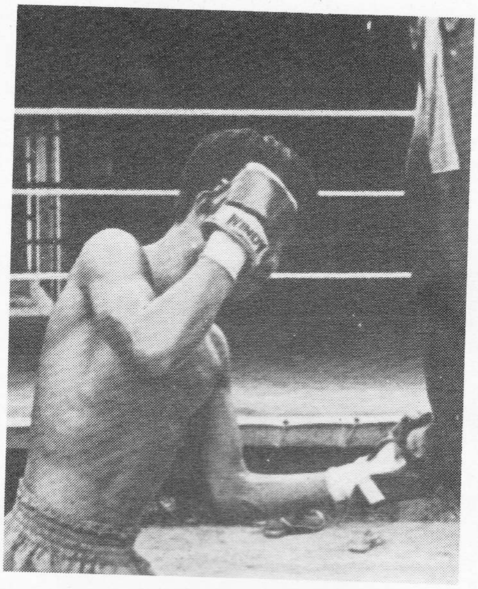


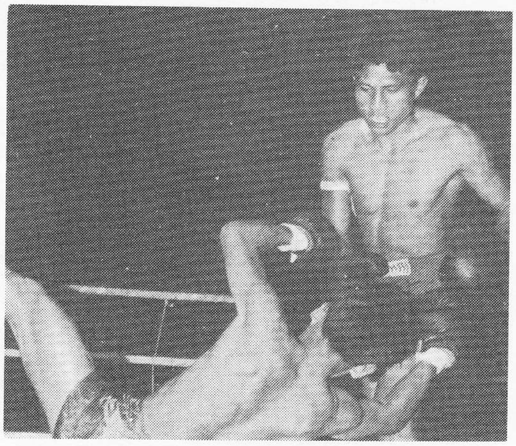






The hook (left) and its use in the ring is shown in the two lower left photos. The long hook is demonstrated (above right).

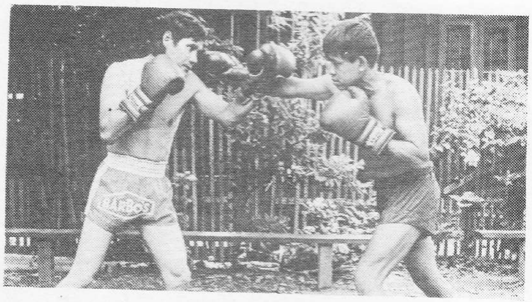




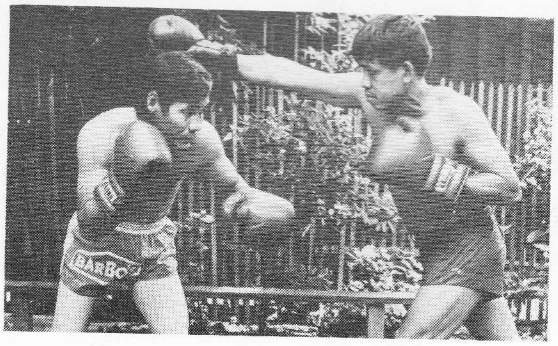
A perfectly executed right hook produced the knock down (above). The uppercut (left) is coming into more popularity in muay-thai.

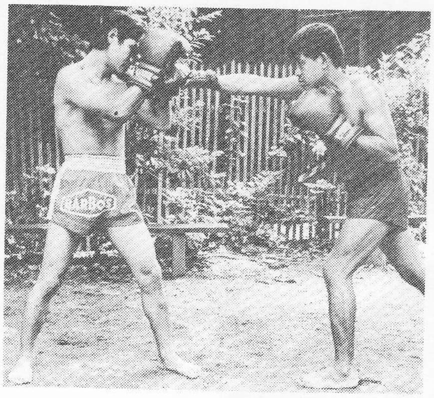
## Defense

Besides covering with gloves and forearms, dodging and blocking are the main defense techniques against punches.



Blocking a punch and ducking are shown (left and lower left, respectively). The most common defense against a punch is covering with the gloves and forearms (below).

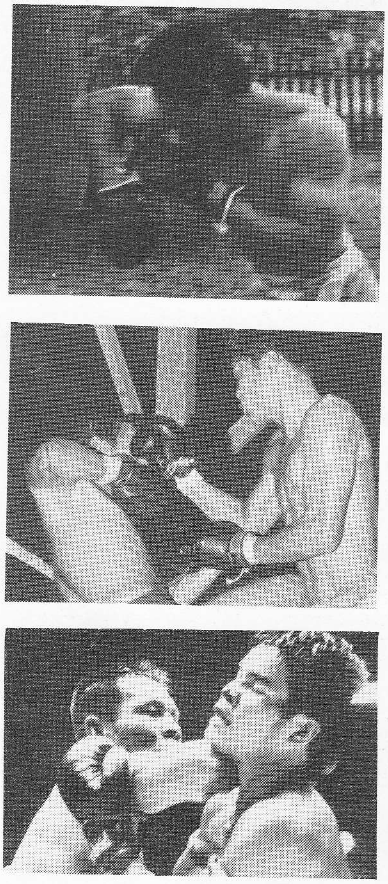




# THE ELBOW

A very typical Muay-Thai short-range weapon, which is also employed at longer distances when used with a jump. Every fighter is proficient in its use and fully aware of the damage it is capable of inflicting. The elbow has the distinction of causing the highest number of injuries. It is used in four different ways.

How the elbow is used to damage opponents is shown here (clockwise). Grabbing the neck to attack the side of the head, an attack to the face, to the neck, the launching of the attack and the forward elbow strike. Form is excellent throughout.



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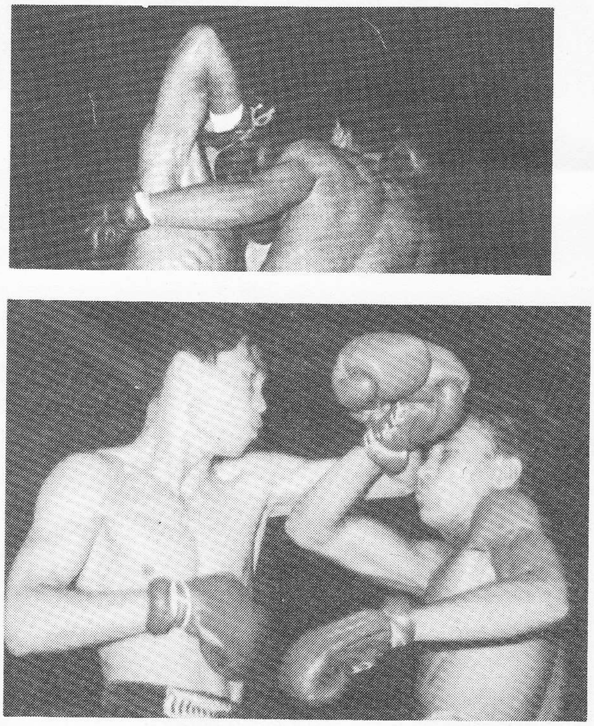


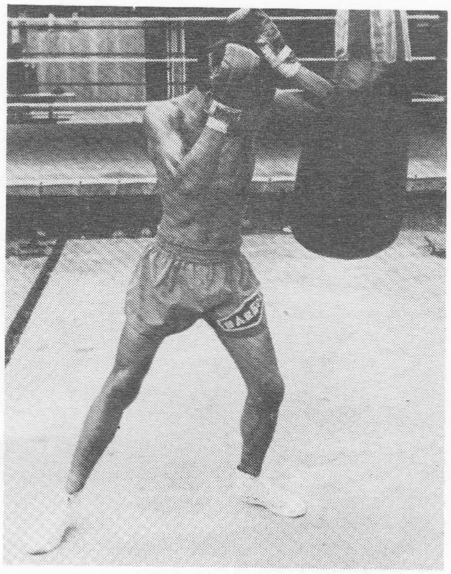
Bangkok Post

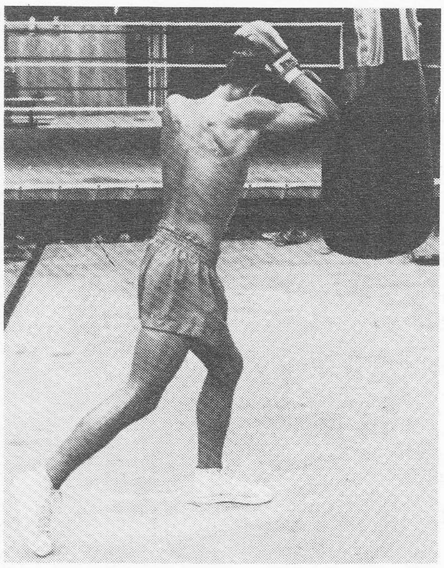
## The Forward Strike

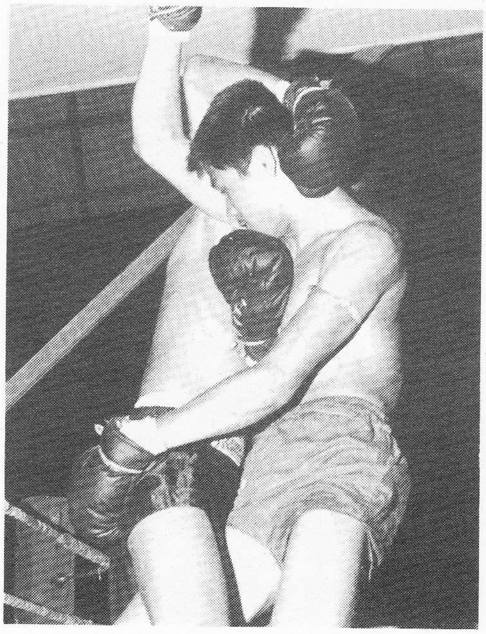
With a more or less horizontally held arm the elbow is propelled with a shoulder twist. Main targets are the face, neck and head.

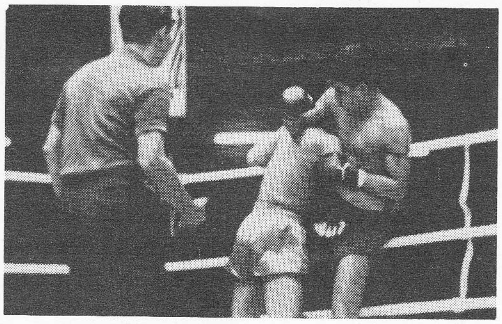
## The Down Strike

This attack is usually directed at the top of the head, neck or spine.





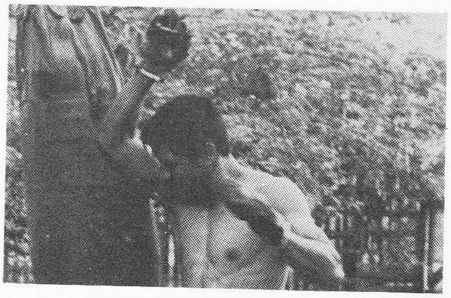


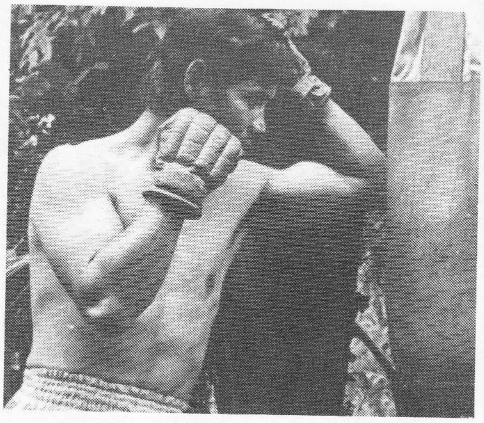


Reverse and straight downward elbow strikes are seen (top, left to right). The use of the downward elbow in the ring is shown in the bottom photos.

## The Upward Strike

The opposite version of the down strike, the elbow shoots up, aimed at the chin or face.



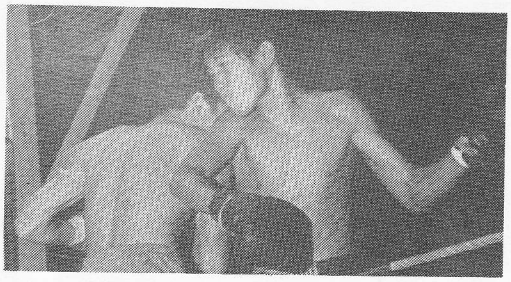


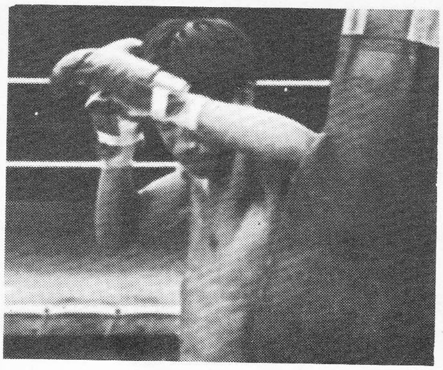
The upward elbow strike against the body (left) and against the face (above) are fortunately practiced against the bag in these photos.

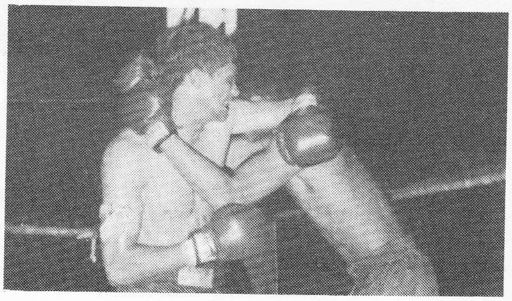
## The Back Strike

This technique is aimed to the rear and executed either horizontally with a body rotation or vertically downwards.

The back strike in practice and in the ring is shown here. American, Dale Kvalheim, lands a backward elbow strike (lower right).

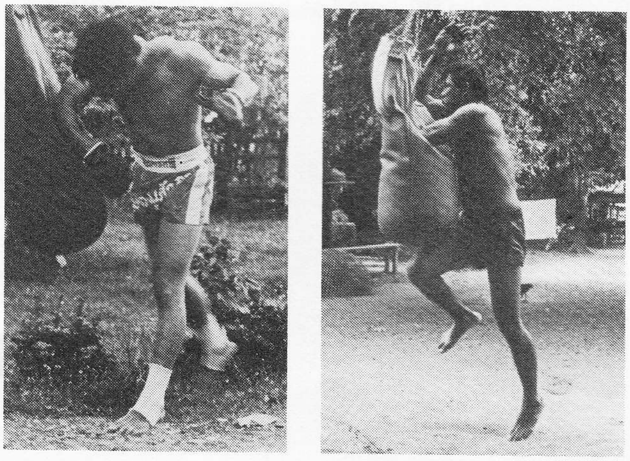






## The Jumping Elbow

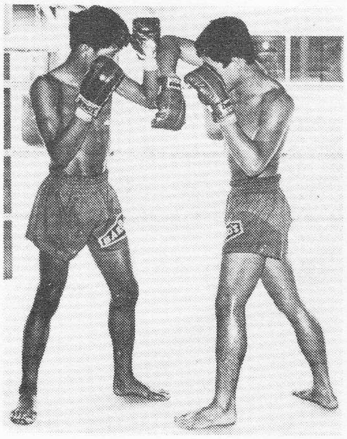
This attack is popular with advanced technicians, who use it against an opponent who is exhausted or stunned. While jumping up and forward, the elbow strikes down at the top of head or spine or forward to the face or neck. If accurately executed, it is usually the final blow.



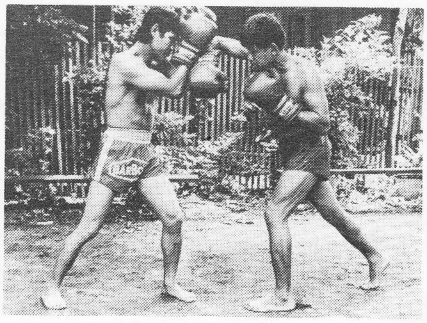
Two methods of delivering the jump elbow attack are shown here in practice against the bag.

## Defense

Because of the short range and speed, an elbow attack is difficult to defend against. The most frequently used techniques are full cover, clinching and forearm blocks.



Full cover defense (below) and a forearm block, leaving the right arm free for a counter punch are effective defenses.

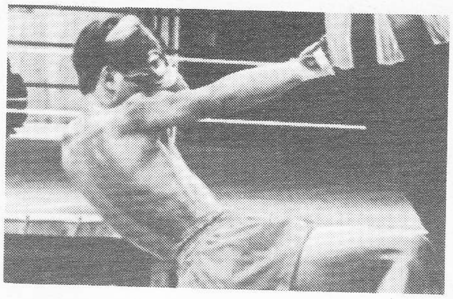


## THE KNEE

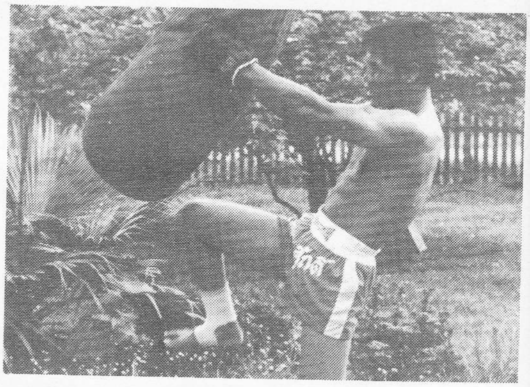
The most powerful and devastating piece of equipment in the Muay-Thai arsenal is, like the elbow, used mainly for in-fighting, but becomes a long-range weapon when used in combination with a jumping attack. Knee kicks are directed at any part of the body, though the main targets are the solar plexus, kidneys, ribs and head. The knee is also used during a fall when a fighter, dropping on an opponent, extends his knee, directed at head, solar plexus or stomach area.

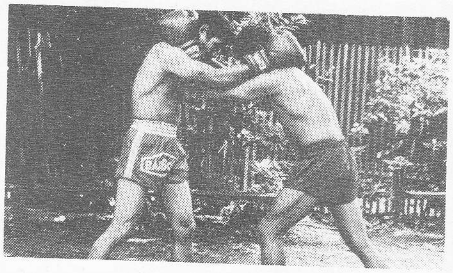
### The Forward Knee Kick

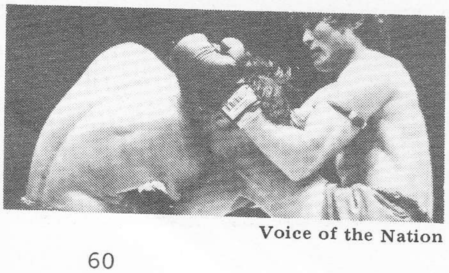
Normally this technique is used after having grabbed the opponent's neck or head, which is jerked down while the knee shoots up.



Forward knee kick (left) and with grab (top right) and in the ring showing the grab and preparation, with the following forward kick to the head (lower left).







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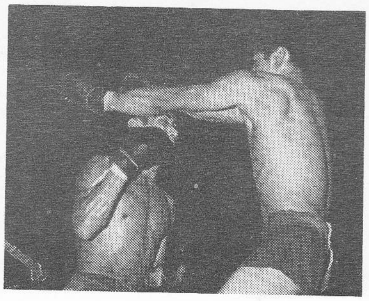
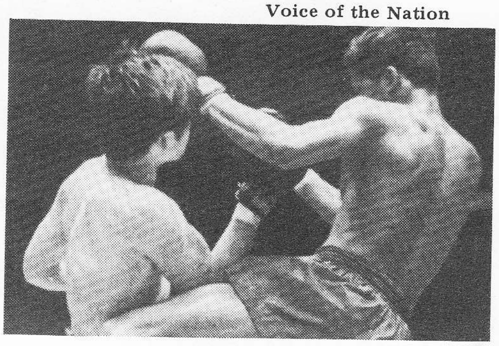


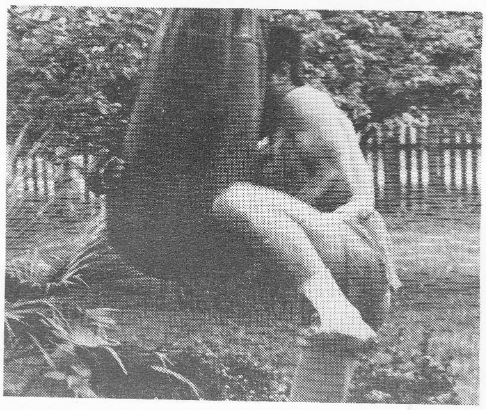
## The Side Knee Kick

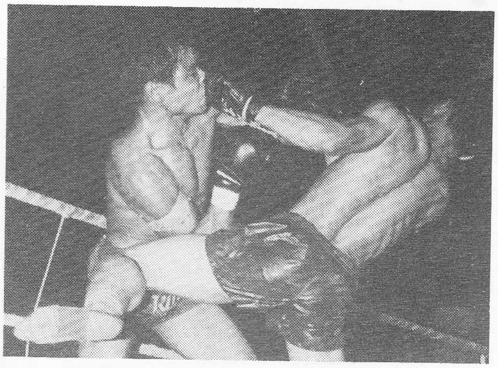
During a clinch this kick attacks the ribs or kidney area.

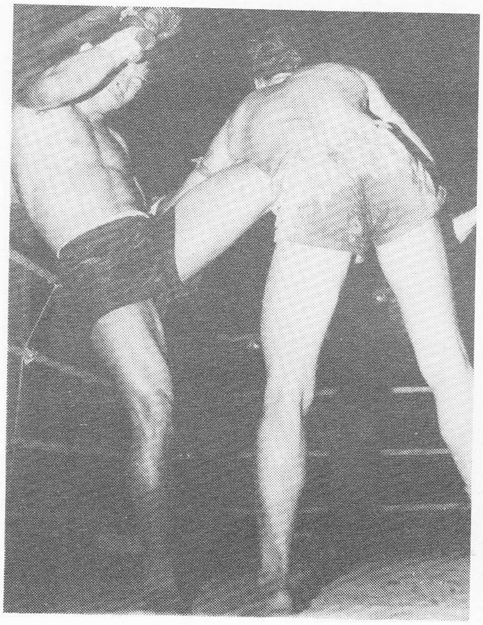
Side knee kick against the bag and in the ring with targets to the lower ribs (top right) midsection with a hook to the face (right), and to the kidney area with neck grab (lower) and a free one to the midsection (bottom left).

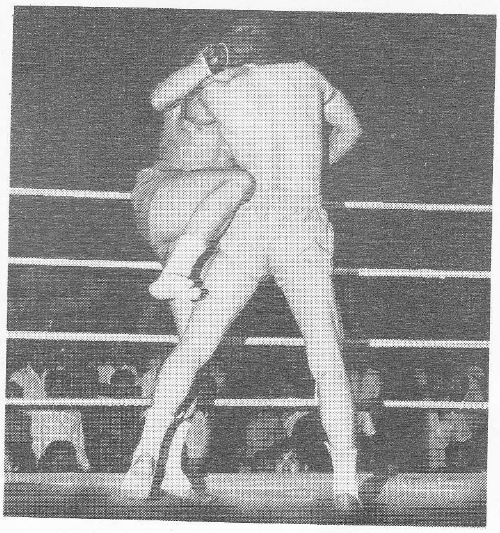
Voice of the Nation





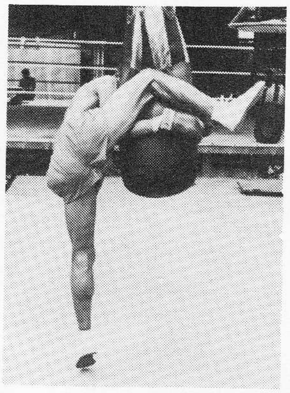






## The Overarm Knee Kick

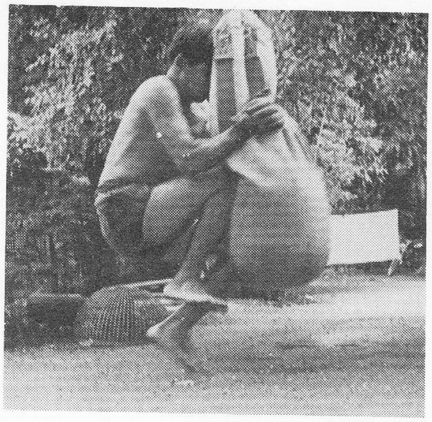
An often-seen technique, applied when an opponent is grabbed around the waist or lower. The knee is directed at any point it can reach above the attacker's own arms.

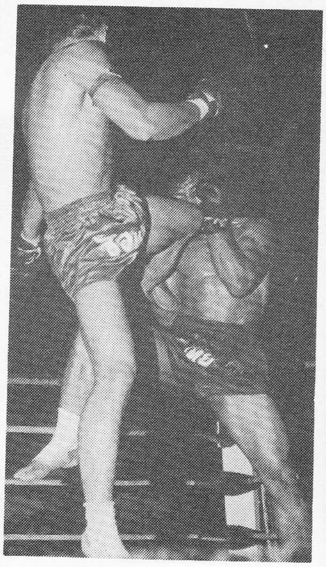


An overarm knee kick above the opponent's pinioned arms aims for anything above the elbows. Fighter tries it out on the bag before using it in the ring.

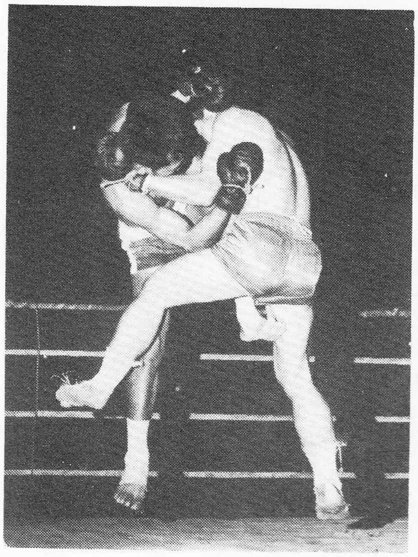
## The Jumping Knee

This spectacular knee attack, executed with a running jump, is feared by every boxer and loved by the fans. Either one or both knees are directed to the face, side of head or body.





Full power follow-through, rather than the snap, is used by these fighters practicing the jumping forward knee kick. Landed on the face (right), it can be decisive.



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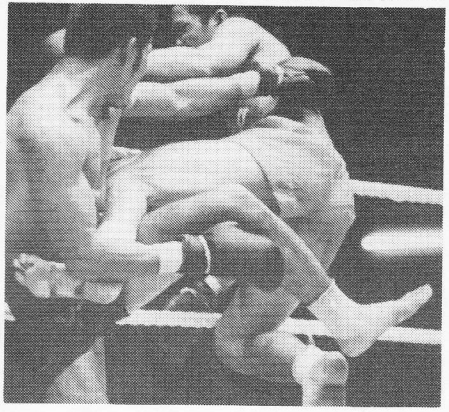
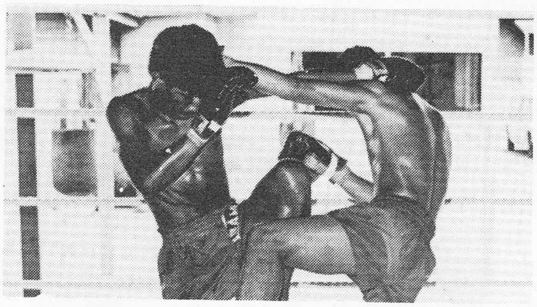
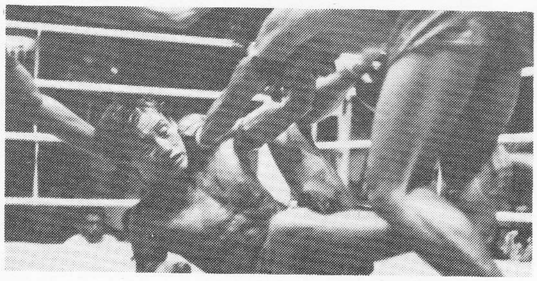


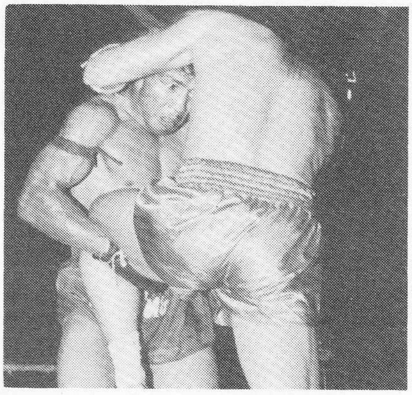
Jump knee kicks in the ring are a total commitment (above). Sometimes fighters launch jump knee kicks simultaneously (left).

## Defense

A number of techniques can effectively frustrate a knee attack which most frequently occurs during a clinch or after having been grabbed by the neck. Pushing the attacker backwards, pulling him forward or throwing him to the side, twisting one's body sideways, lifting the opponent off the ground and blocking with legs or forearms, are all used to avoid being hit by the knee.







Blocking the knee kick involves the shin (right, top), the push away and the grab to immobilize further attacks (left).

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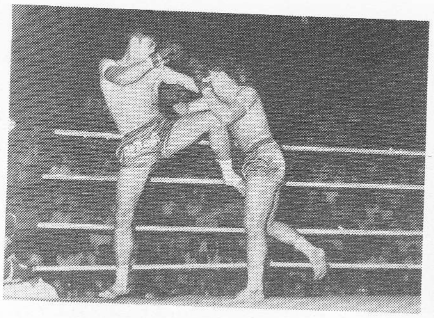
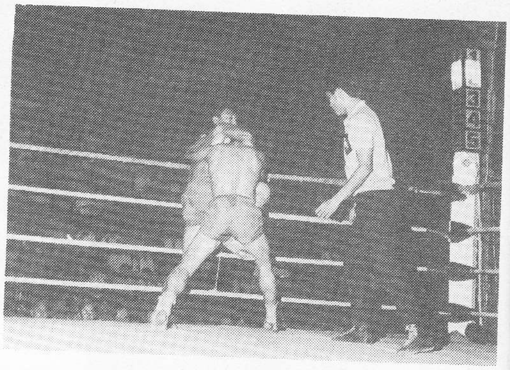




A jumping attacker lands a knee kick while grabbing his opponent's neck (above). Pushed against the ropes the boxer prevents a knee kick by blocking with his right leg (right).

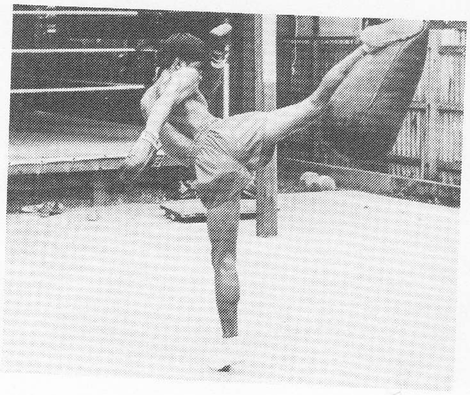
## THE FOOT

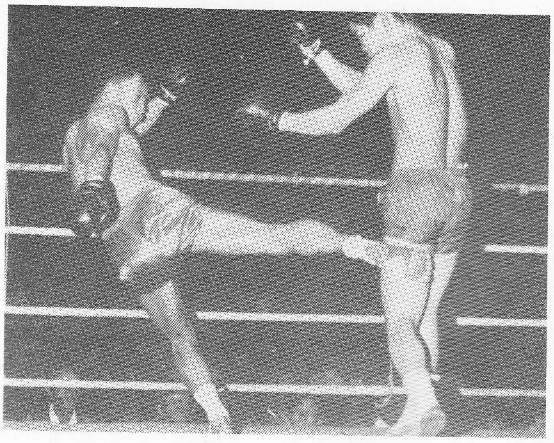
A young Muay-Thai trainer once said that his students use more kicks than all fist, elbow and knee attacks put together. While this statement cannot be generalized, it is probably true that most boxers use foot techniques more often than any other. It is interesting to note that kicks are executed with a full-powered "follow-through," the "snap" kick being virtually unknown.

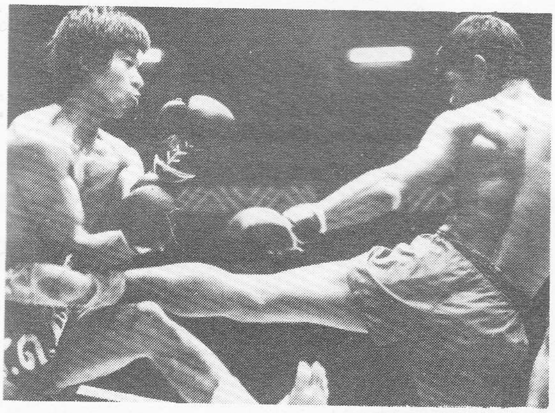
### The Round Kick

This technique is the well-known Muay-Thai trade mark, delivered with the instep or lower shin, two rather sensitive parts of the leg, that have been toughened to an unbelievable degree. Critics have on occasion labelled this kick as ineffective, but it is quite clear that they have never been on the receiving end of it. The round kick is directed at any part of the body and has been responsible for a great number of first round knockouts.

The "instep" round kick is a famous muay-thai trademark. Fighters practice it for hours against bags and use it in the ring at the first opportunity.







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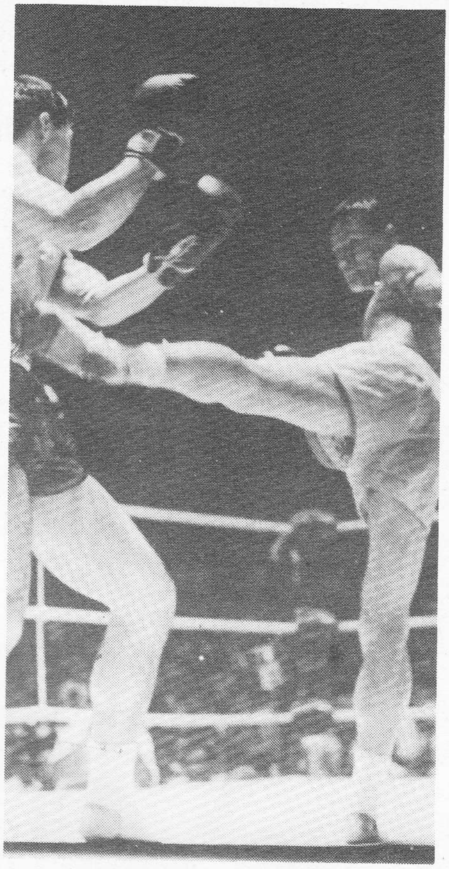
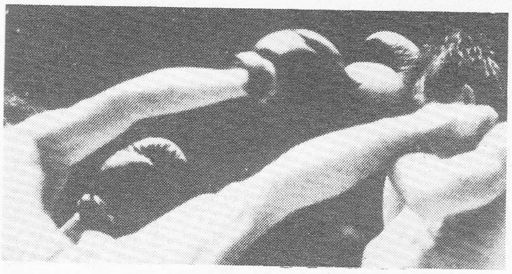
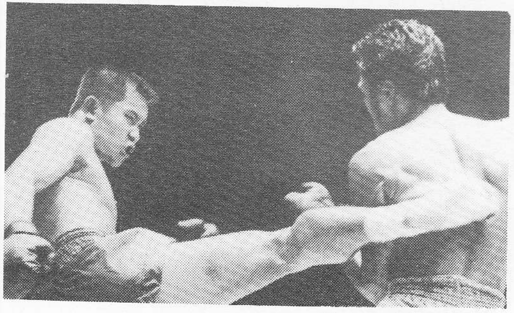


Bangkok Post



Voice of the Nation

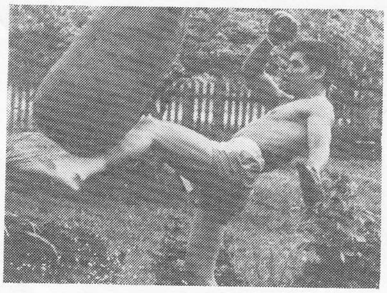
Dangerous and punishing are the round kicks administered against the leg (top left), the stomach (center left) and to the solar plexus (top right). Round kicks to the head account for many knockouts in the ring (left, lower center). A round kick to the spine or kidney finds a favorite target.



Voice of the Nation

## The Front Kick

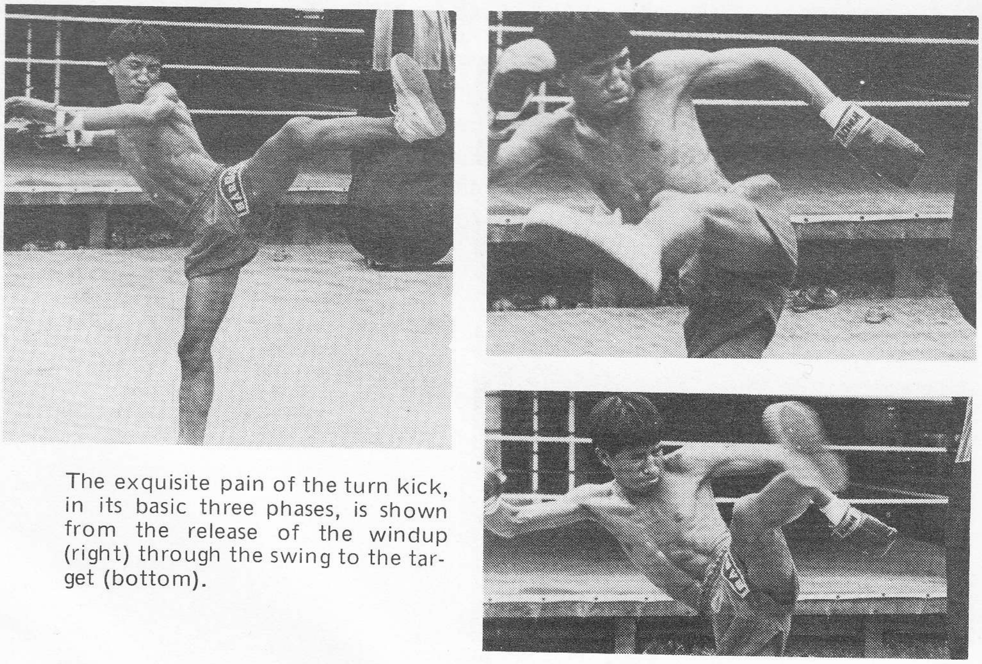
A seldom seen technique, directed to the groin, or from the side when an opponent bends over. Impact area is, like the round kick, instep and shin.



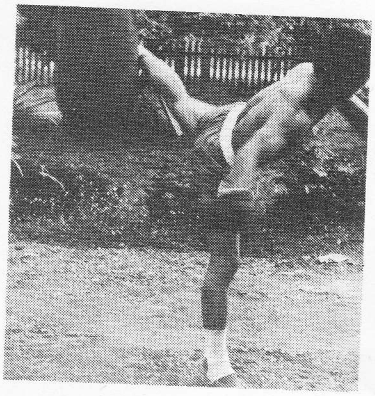
Against the bag, fortunately, is this front kick to the groin.

## The Turn Kick

Not many fighters employ this technique, simply because only a few boxing teachers find it effective and incorporate it in their training program.



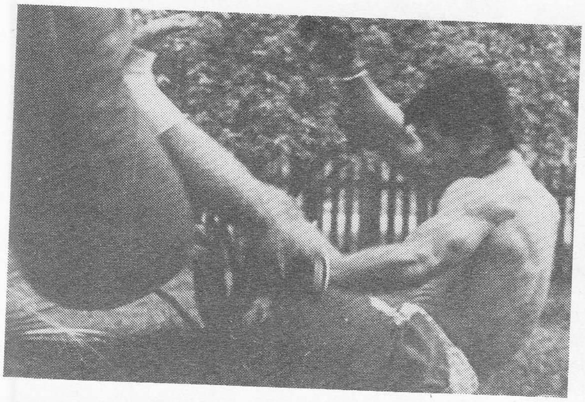
The exquisite pain of the turn kick, in its basic three phases, is shown from the release of the windup (right) through the swing to the target (bottom).

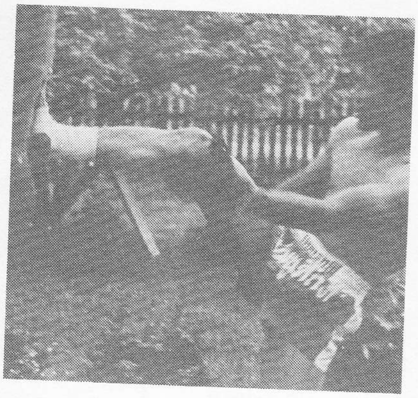


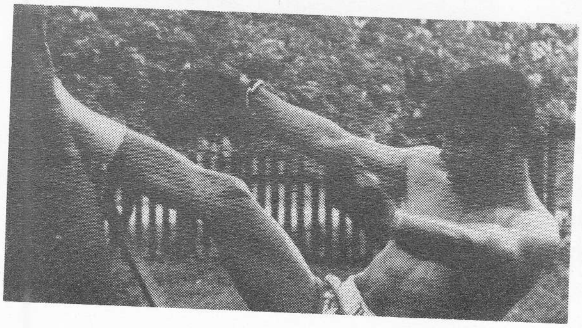
A variation on the turn kick has the toes pointed downward.

## The Front Thrust

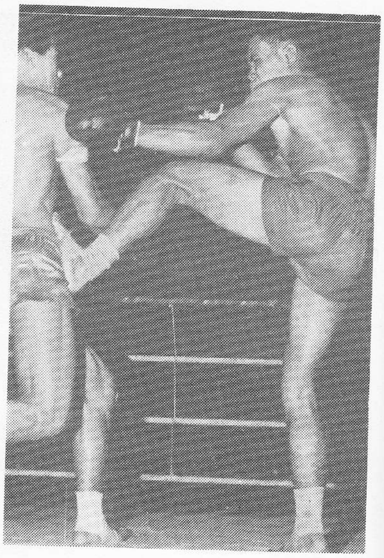
A very popular and often seen technique, whereby an opponent is kept at a distance with a foot push to the front. It is usually delivered with the ball of the foot and directed to the midsection. When executed with the heel and aimed at the face, it presents the ultimate insult to a fighter. Because it is more difficult and slightly slower than the ordinary front thrust, it shows superiority and makes the receiver of the attack feel small. The technique is designed to enrage an opponent and so make him lose his temper.







The slower front thrust landed by a superior fighter is calculated to totally demoralize an opponent. To the midsection (above) and to the face for the ultimate insult (top left) or to the head (below) should start a countdown.

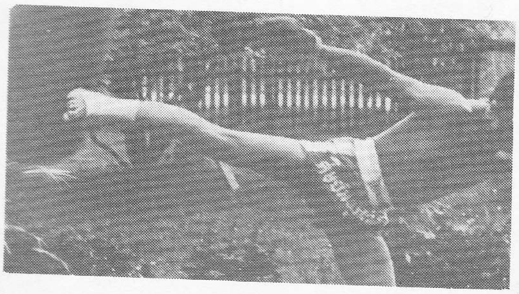


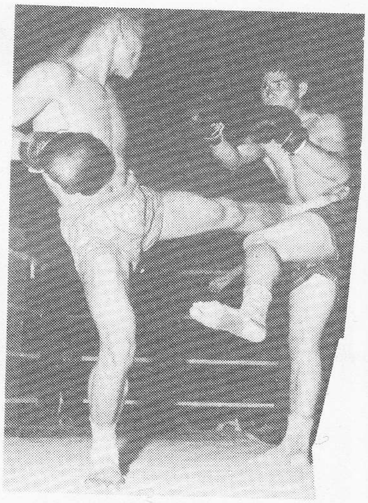
By pushing his opponent back, the fighter on the left prevents his opponent from kicking (right photo). The front thrust in the ring is part of the muay-thai boxer's effective arsenal of attack.

Voice of the Nation

### The Side Thrust

Its function is similar to that of the front thrust. Although it may look somewhat like a side-kick in karate, it is a push and not a kick.

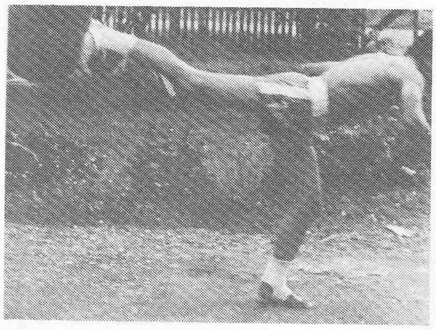




The side thrust against the bag and against the opponent in the ring demands the stamina and agility that mark the expert muay-thai fighter anywhere.

### The Back Thrust

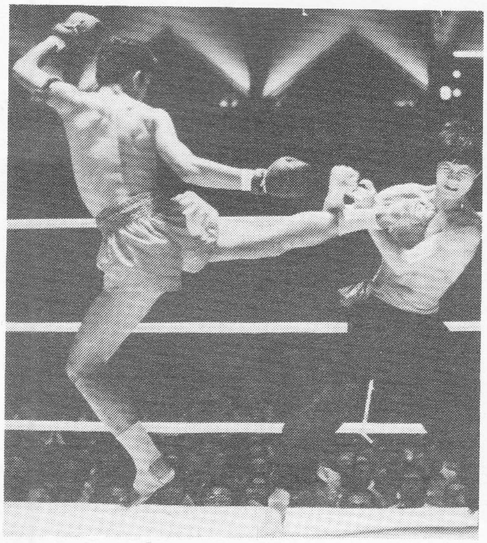
A foot push directed towards the rear, having the same function and using the same technique as the front or side thrust.



The back thrust demands accuracy, speed, agility, stamina and a charismatic style to be at all effective in the ring. The fighter landing the thrust against the bag demonstrates all of those qualities.

## Jump Kicks

Both the round kick and the front thrust are often delivered in connection with a jump, either straight up or with a run. Both are popular techniques used frequently by veteran technicians.



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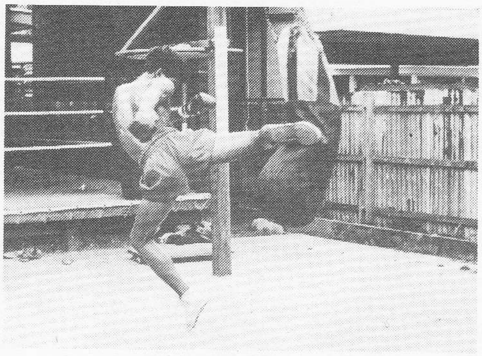
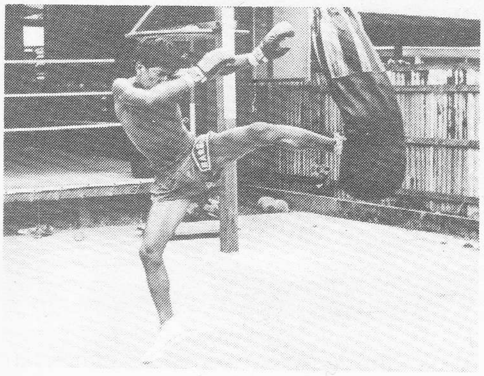
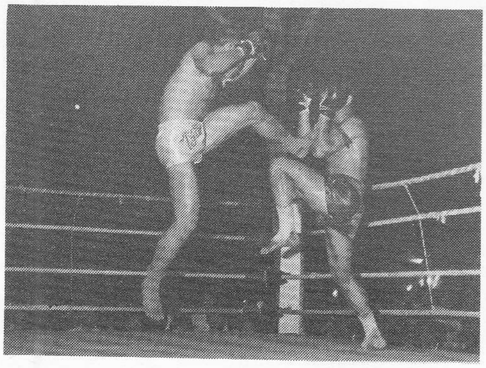


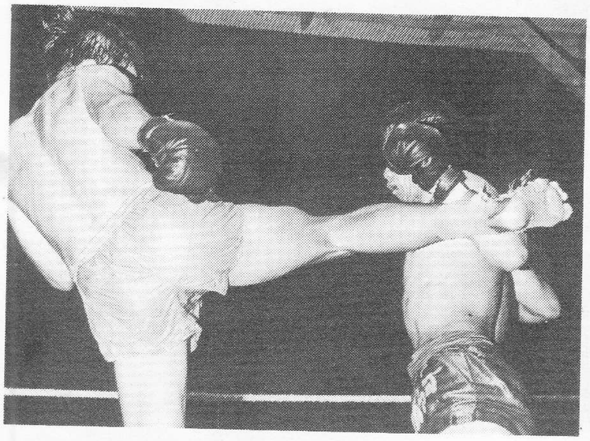


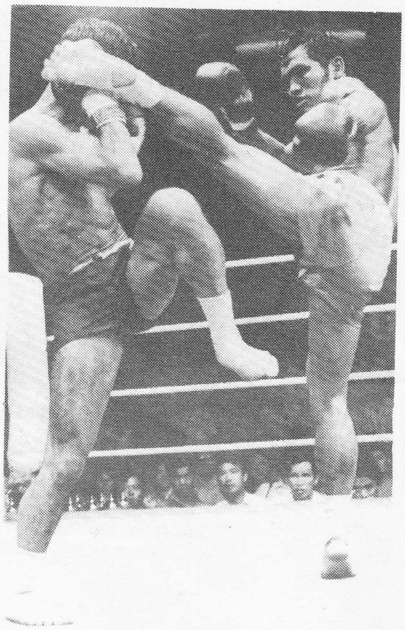


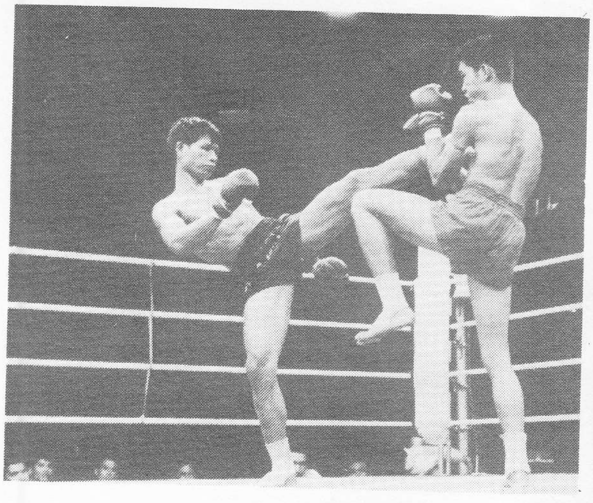
The jump round kick against the bag and to the left used to KO a kung-fu fighter from Hong Kong. In the lower two photos the jump front thrust is seen against the bag and in the ring. Note position of the hands.

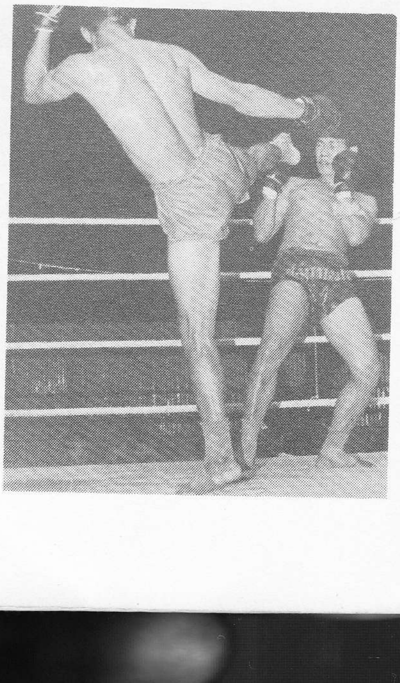
## Defense

Besides retreating, ducking and dodging, kicks are blocked with forearms and legs. When kicked to the midsection, the leg is often grabbed, always an advantage in a counterattack.

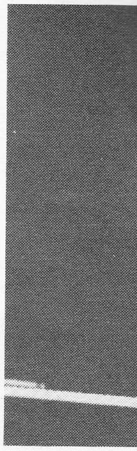








Blocking techniques use the forearm, singly (top, left) or doubly (below and top right). The leg is also used to block in both these two photos. A simple retreat or bending back is an effective defense (bottom, right).



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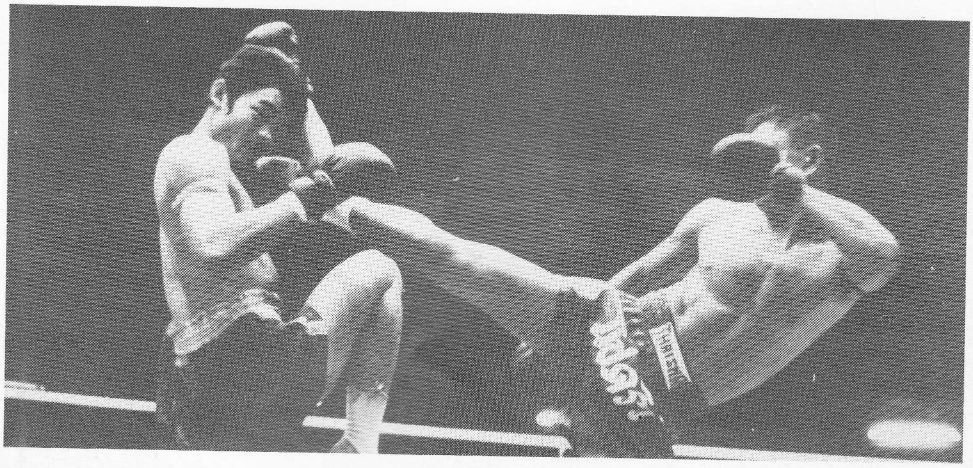
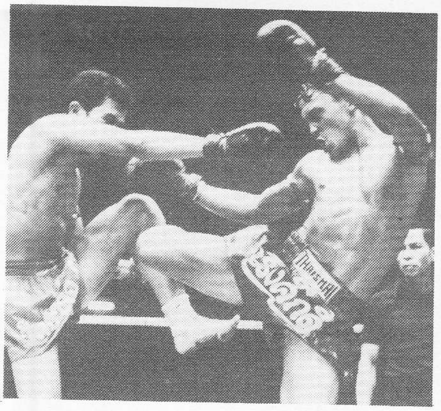
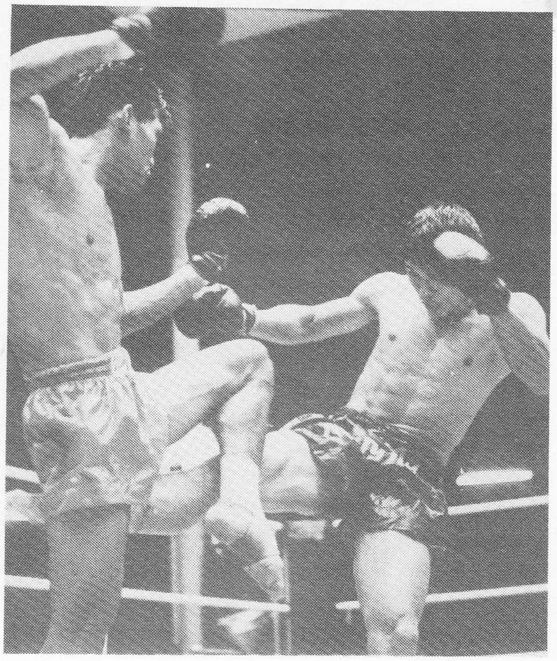
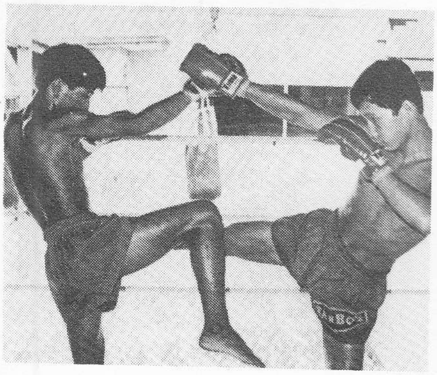


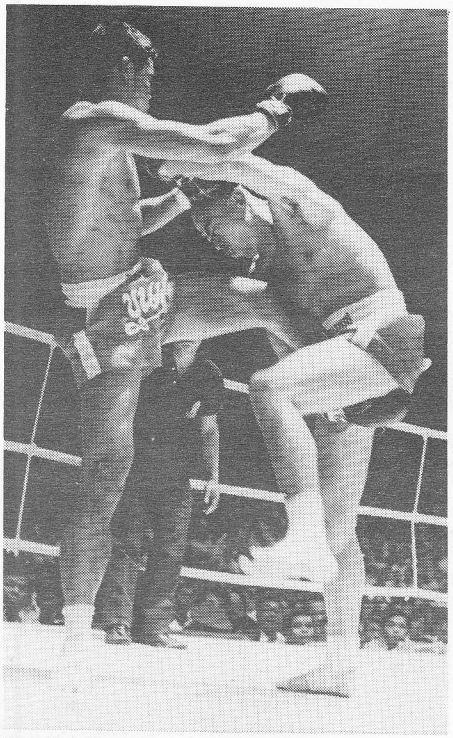
Veteran fighter on the left uses both arms and leg to cover low, mid and high section in defense against a round kick.



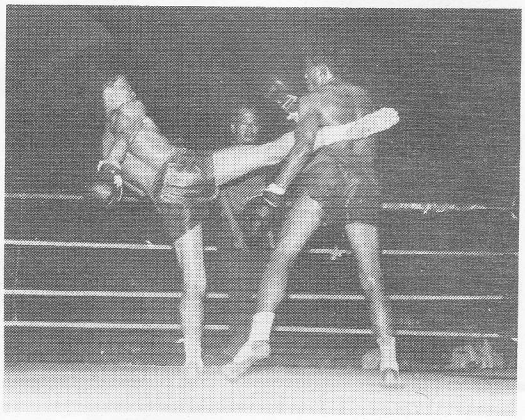




Veterans block with the shin (top photos). The knee blocks against a round kick (bottom, left).



Japanese fighter grabs leg of Thai opponent and counters (left). Stopping the front thrust by wiping aside, if the defender's reaction is fast enough (center, left). Round kick stopped with foot thrust to thigh (bottom, left). Trapping the kicking leg and countering are shown in stages of preparation (right column).



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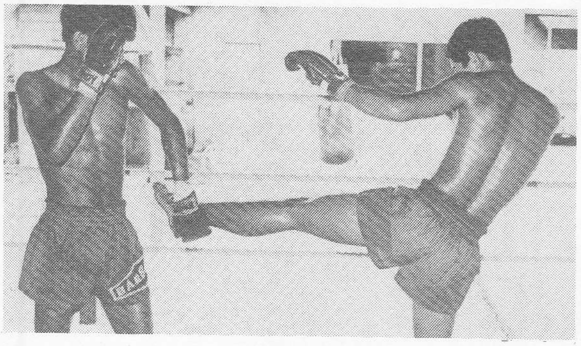
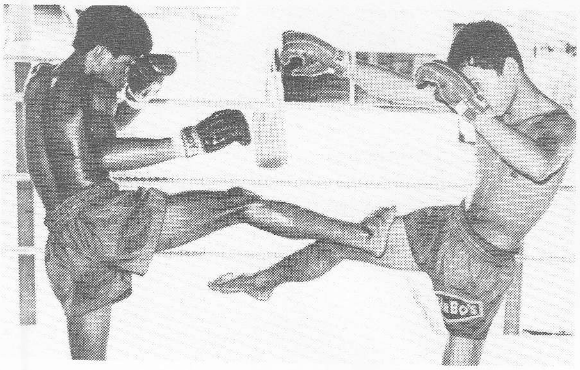
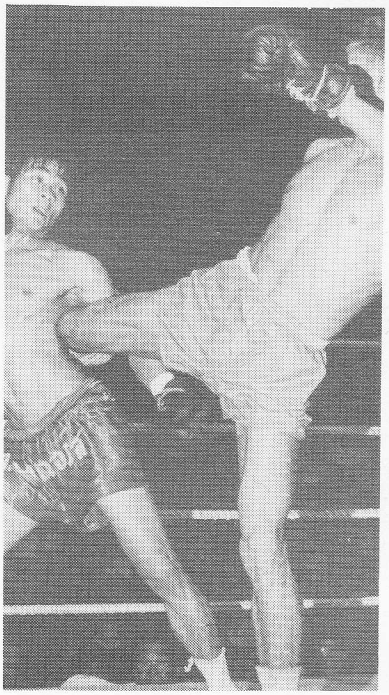
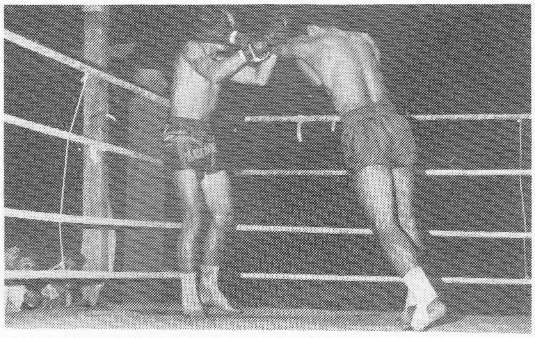




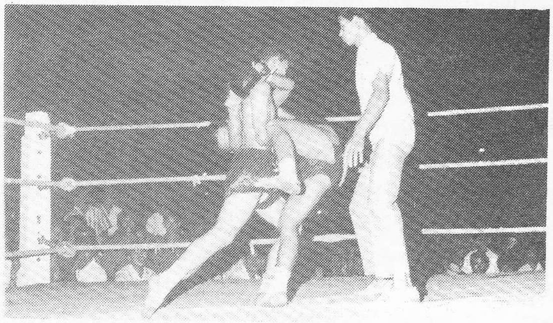


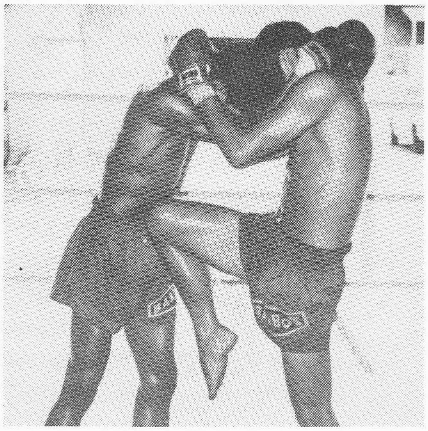
## HOLDS AND THROWS

Besides clinching, Muay-Thai uses a technique where the neck or head is grabbed with one or both hands. With a downward jerk, it is part of the upward knee attack, but may also be used to throw an opponent, either backwards or to the side. Pulling him forward is legal but not often used. The throw has to be accomplished with hands and arms only and may not be aided by shoulder, hip or foot techniques.



Grabbing the neck and pulling the head and trunk onto the upcoming knee is a favorite technique. Throws are permitted in muay-thai, as long as feet, hips and shoulders stay out of it (lower, left).





## VITAL POINTS

Muay-Thai makes quite a fetish of the question of vital points, probably a leftover from the pre-glove period, when techniques were employed that are no longer permitted or even possible today. Most teachers have their own ideas, which they keep secret and only teach to a trusted student. In the ring fourteen points are recognized as weak spots:

1. The top of the head.
2. The temples.
3. The eyes.
4. The nose.
5. The chin.
6. The jaw.
7. The Adam's apple.
8. The nape and top of the spine.
9. The area just under the heart.
10. The solar plexus.
11. The floating ribs.
12. The lower stomach region.
13. The kidneys.
14. The testicles.

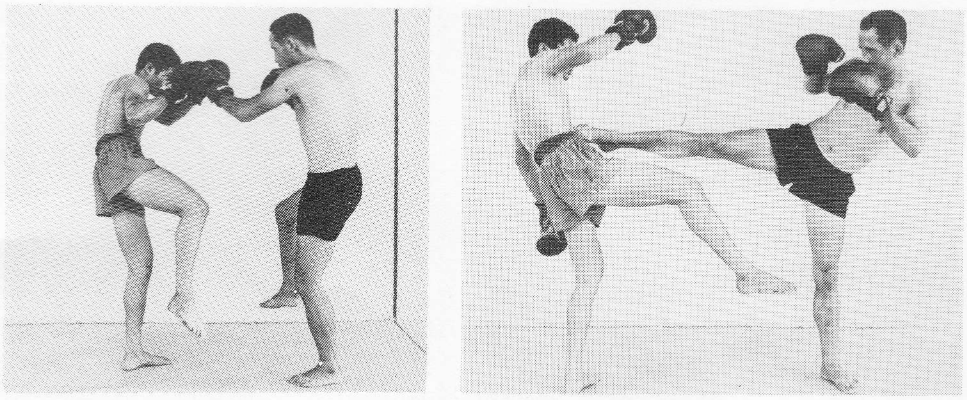
## COMBINATION TECHNIQUES

Defense and counterattack combinations in Muay-Thai are probably as numerous as fighters. A novice, after learning a series of standard moves, soon adopts his own variations and, with increasing ring experience, refines his style. Many of his techniques become so individualized, that it's hard to recognize them as the text book moves he had once learned.

In former times, fight combinations were coded and remembered by a beginner, by some poetic sounding little verses. One of the main defense principles, for instance, was: Bpong—Bpat—Bpit—Bpert*, each word having possibly more than one meaning. It can be roughly translated as: Bpong—prepare to receive an attack, also to shout, somewhat like the Japanese kiai. Bpat—to ward off or block. Bpit—to close up, to cover, especially vital points. Bpert—the word means "to open," implying in combat to open the gap between the two fighters, to retreat, to open the cover after the attack, to relax.

One of the favorite attack principles was: Tum—Tab—Jab—Hack*. Tum—to throw down, done in a number of ways. Tab—to press down or hold. Jab—to catch hold of, grab or apply a lock. Hack—to break, meaning dislocate, disjoin or fracture. Advanced students and a teacher's favorite pupils were instructed in the higher forms of combat with similar word series, like: Pragob—Pragab—Jab lang—Kao kang lang—Hack gaan kaw*. Again the words have several meanings or symbolize different techniques. A straight translation would read: Grab—join-in—pull—step behind—break the neck. Needless to say these techniques, used in pre-ring times, were mainly taught for self defense. Today, they have all but disappeared.

Fight combinations used in modern Muay-Thai are too numerous to mention in this book, but to give the reader an idea what a bout looks like, some of the more popular techniques are shown. They do not exist in theory only but have all proved to be effective in the ring and can be seen during any boxing program.



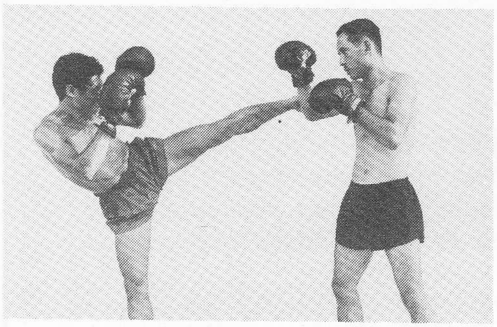
The fighter on the left in these photos is preparing to land a kick. The man on the right counters with a straight foot thrust to the mid-section to prevent the launching of the attack.

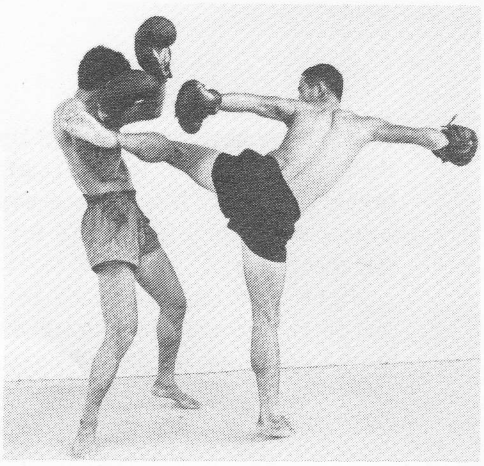
## TECHNIQUES

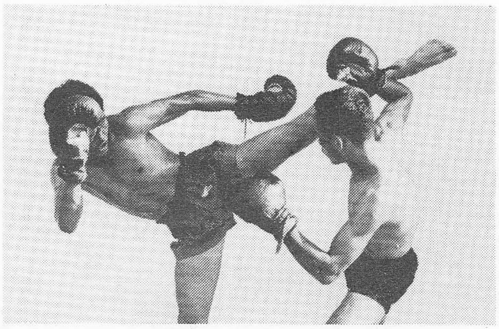
A boxer, anticipating a round kick, tries to frustrate the attack with a forward foot thrust aimed at the solar plexus. This technique is very popular and, if executed accurately and with enough force, has caused many a surprise knockout. Although the foot thrust, because of its shorter travel distance, is faster than the round kick, it still calls for a quick reaction.

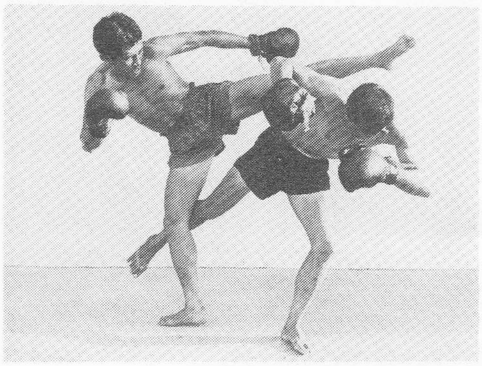
A high-section round kick is blocked with the forearm and immediately countered with a round kick. This is a popular move, used by every fighter.

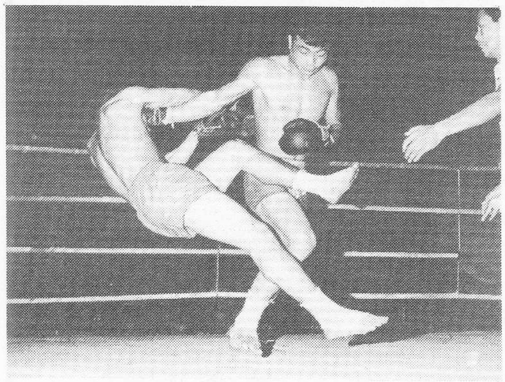
A high-section round kick is blocked and countered with a low kick to the opponent's supporting leg and sweeping it from under him. This technique depends on the counter attacker's stance or











A round kick is blocked and countered with a round kick (top photos). A forearm blocks a high-section round kick and a right low-section kick delivered against the attacker's supporting leg (center photos). Kick to lower leg with punch upsets fighter (lower left).

foot position, which is the reverse from that in the previous technique.

A twin attack, like the round kick accompanied by a punch, is usually absorbed by a full cover and countered with a kick, either high or low, depending on stance.

An often seen move is a round kick blocked by forearm after which the attacker's leg is grabbed. The defender counters with a similar kick and has to be careful that his own leg will not be trapped. If so, his opponent will throw him by either lifting or pushing his leg backwards.

After a leg has been grabbed, many fighters will counter with a punch instead of a kick, a move preferred by boxers with a long arm reach.

If a fighter is pitched against an opponent with a reputation for weak or slow foot techniques, he will often ignore and absorb a kick and move straight in with punches.

Front and low round kicks are blocked with the toughened shin followed by counterpunches. This technique is quite common with ring veterans but less often used by young fighters whose shins are not hardened enough to absorb the painful blows.

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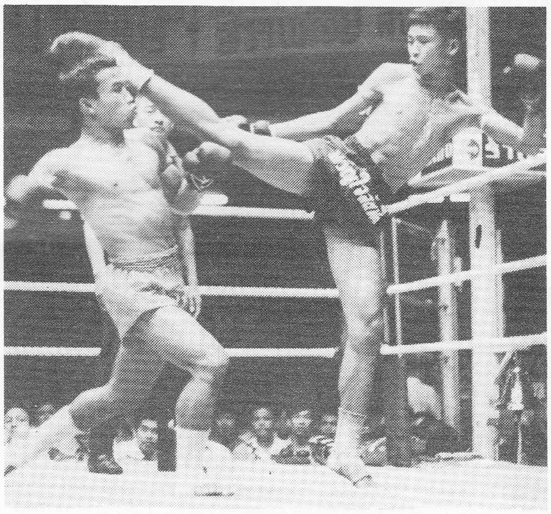
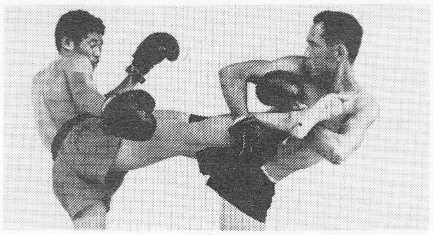
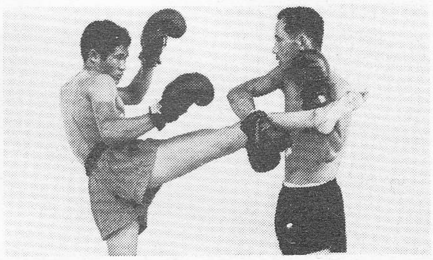
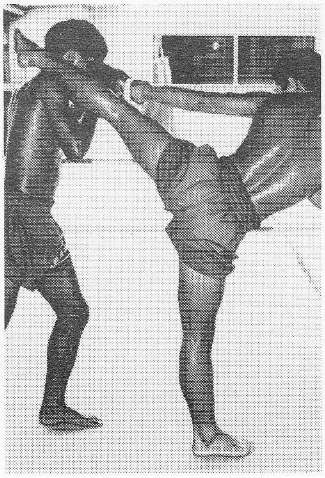
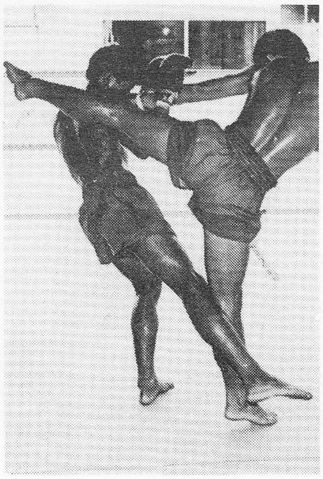


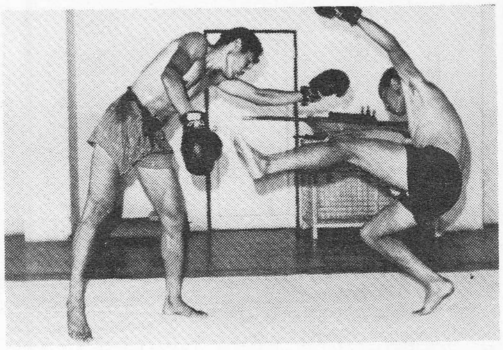


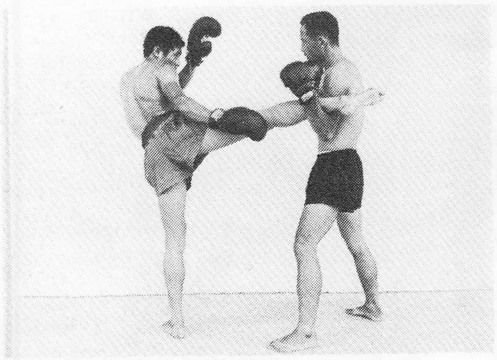


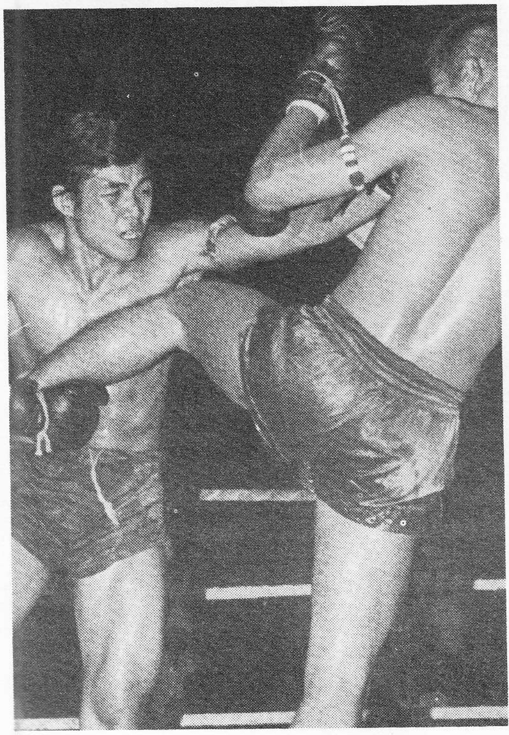


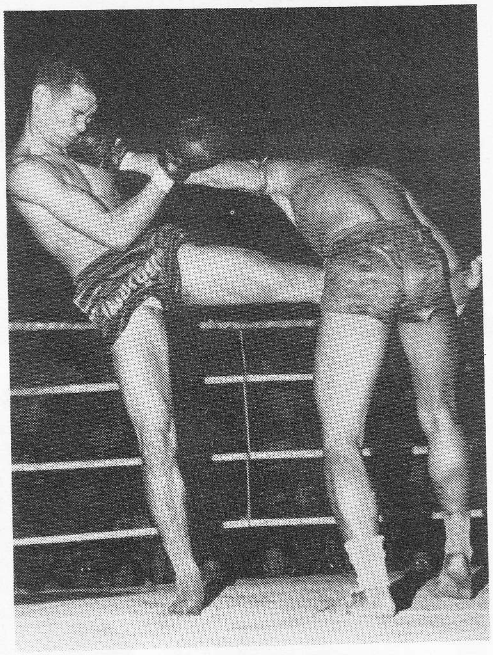


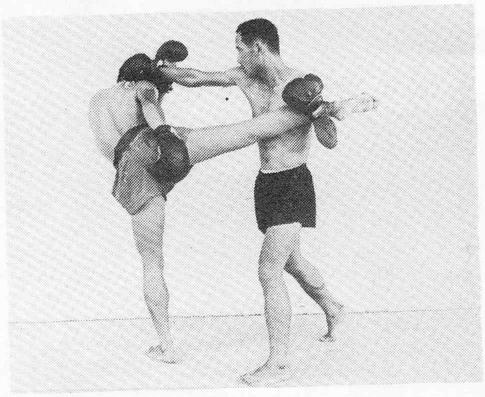
Ignoring round kick, boxer (left) attacks supporting leg of opponent (top left). Grabbing and holding leg and landing counter kick score (top right). A variation has right round kick blocked with left forearm and grabbed with right hand (center right). Kick and punch taken by full cover (lower left), and countered by a low kick to topple opponent (bottom right).



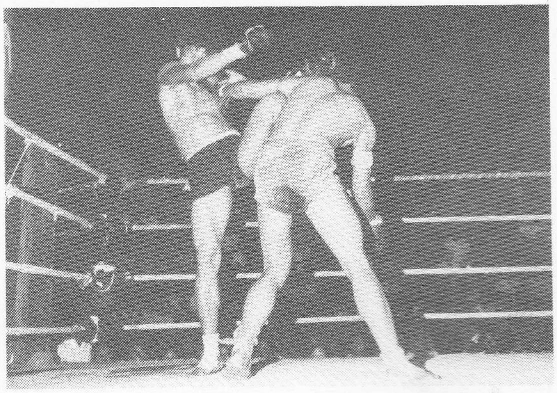




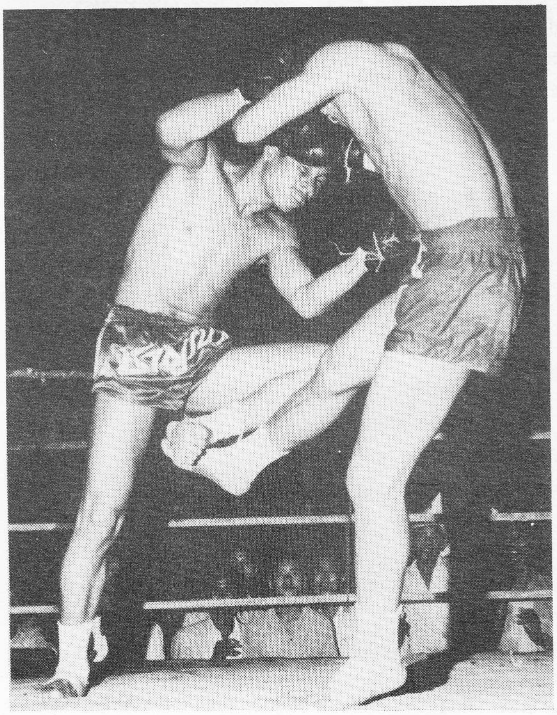


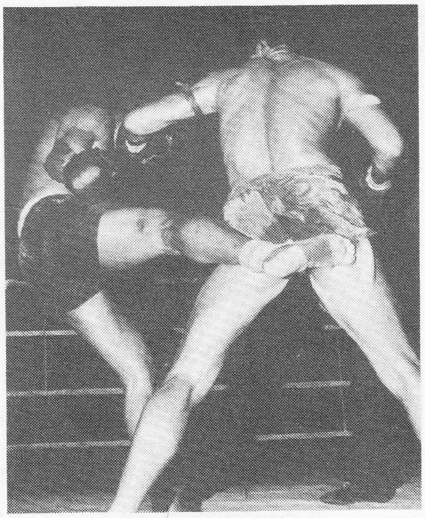


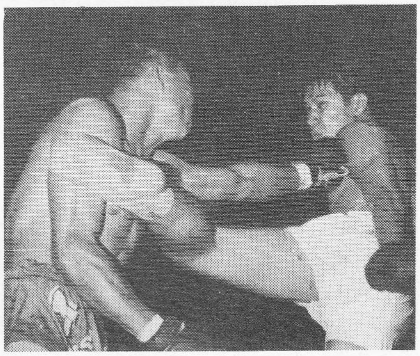
If original attacker can catch the leg, he will throw his opponent backwards (top left). A round kick is absorbed by the upper arm and grabbed (center left). The fighter on the left absorbs a shin kick to the chest, grabs leg and counters with a straight punch to the face (lower left). Most fighters with a long arm reach prefer a punch to a kick (top right). The leg is held while a counter punch is executed (lower right).

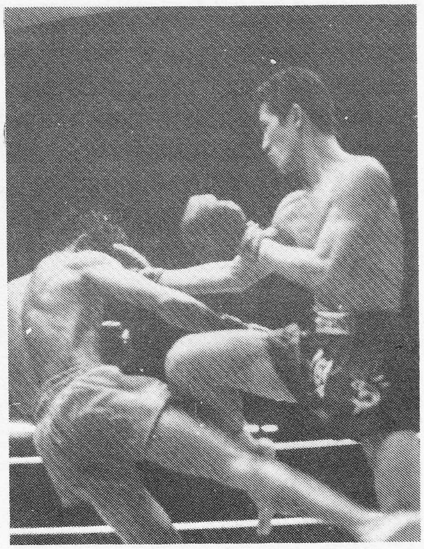


Ignoring the oncoming kick, a fighter rushes in a straight punch (top left). A long hook is the answer to a powerful round kick (top right). A straight punch, a fraction faster than the oncoming foot lessens the impact of the kick (center right). A low-section round kick is blocked by the right leg, followed by a counter punch (bottom right). A front kick is blocked by the lower leg and countered with an uppercut to the mid-section (lower left).









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Evading or dodging a kick followed by a counter kick is one of the trademarks of an experienced boxer. It calls for a very quick reaction and is not seen too often.

Attacking with a kick and punch simultaneously is very popular, but difficult, and more often than not sloppily executed.

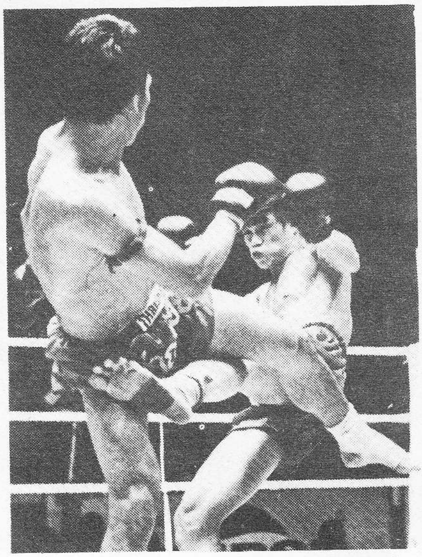
A favorite with fighters having a long arm reach, is to push an attacker away or keep him at a distance by holding the palm against his forehead or grabbing his throat. If the attacker does not retreat but applies pressure by moving forward, the hand will slip around his neck, and pull it down to meet an upward knee kick.

Once grabbed by the neck, a knee attack to the upper leg muscles, stomach, solar plexus, ribs or face, is sure to follow. The defender usually tries to get out of danger by throwing his opponent sideways, for which he may not use a foot sweep, or by pushing him away.

Frontal knee kicks are quite effectively blocked by one or both forearms and countered with an uppercut aimed at the solar plexus. Many a knee technician, especially one with a weak mid-section, has succumbed to this counter punch and been knocked out.

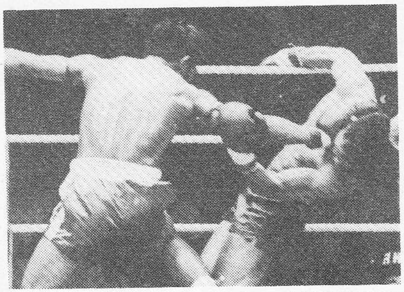
A popular defense against knee attacks is to grab and hold the kicking leg and in turn counter with a knee kick.

Elbow strikes are blocked by forearm and immediately countered with another elbow attack. They normally keep both



Voice of the Nation

Dodging a round kick while launching a counter kick shows superior technique of the fighter on the right (lower left). Throwing a kick and punch simultaneously is usually ineffective (below). Punch is a shove and attack illegal with man holding ropes.



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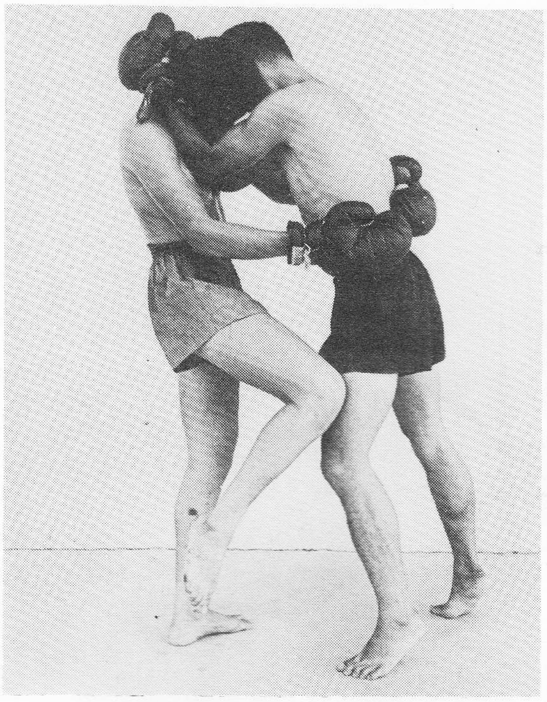
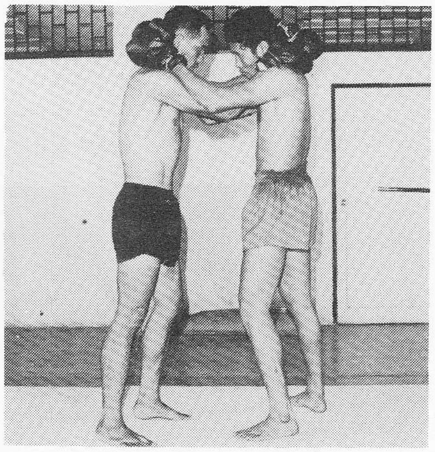
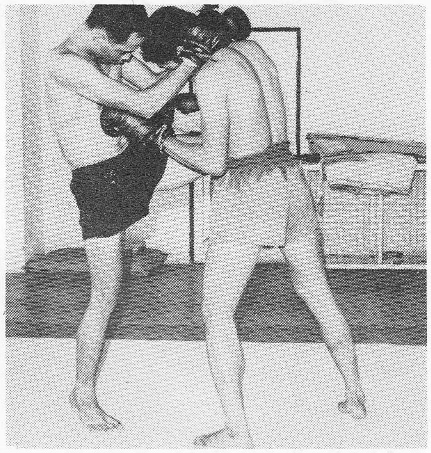
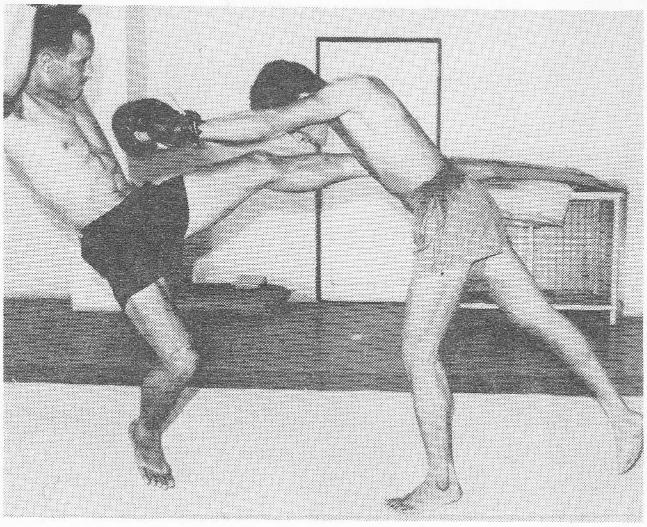
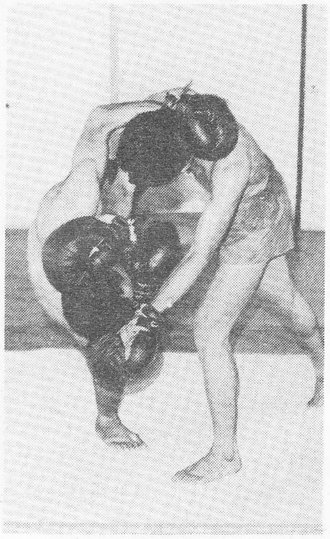


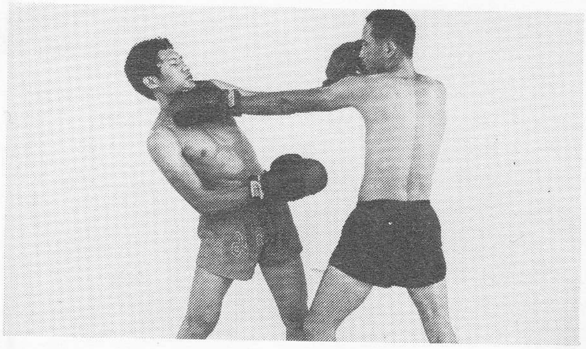


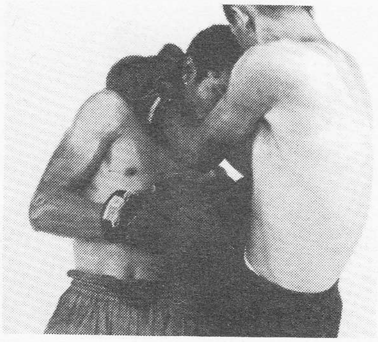


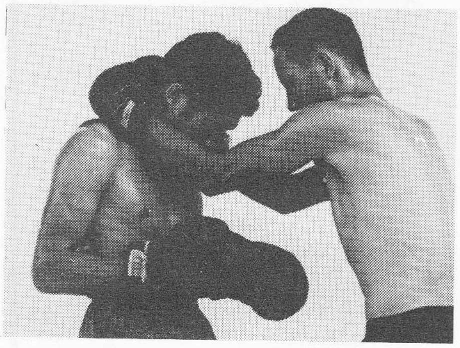
Attack to upper leg (top left). Kicks are often used in clinches. Grab of an opponent's neck usually signals start of a knee attack (top right). Defender against neck grab and kick uses arms to block or push away attacker (center right). Opponent thrown off (lower left). Defender throws attacker sideways in neck grab (lower right). Leg sweep is prohibited.

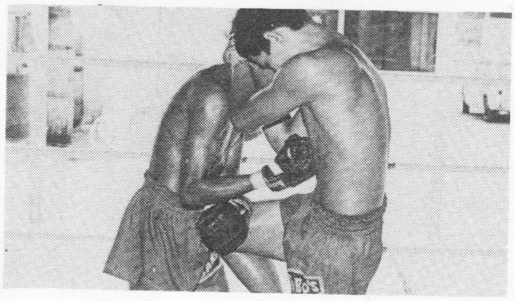




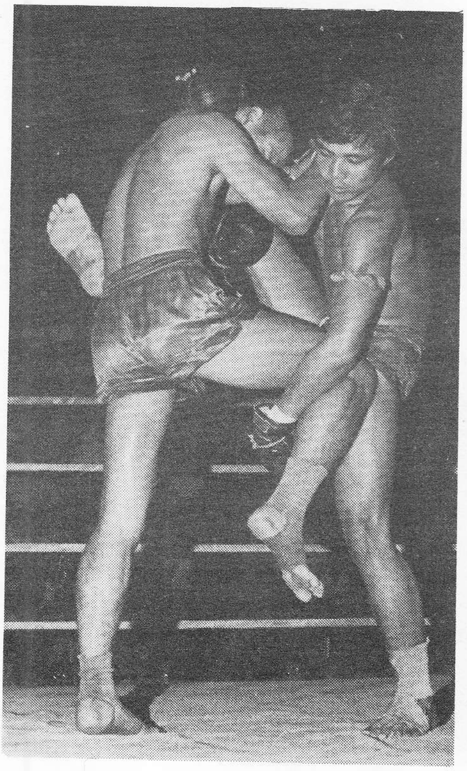


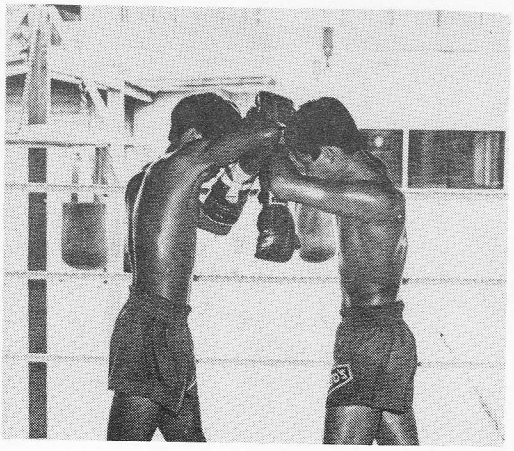






Boxer holds opponent's throat, preventing his closing in (top left). Should opponent exert forward pressure, the hands slip around the neck (left center) and the head pulls down to the knee attack (top right). A knee attack is blocked by the forearm while countering with an uppercut to solar plexus (center right). The boxer grabs and holds the attacking leg while shooting a knee kick to opponent's head (lower left). Elbow strikes are blocked with forearm and countered with elbow attacks. Unguarded midsection is an easy target for an experienced boxer.





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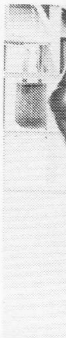

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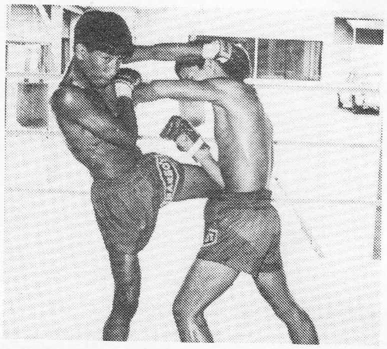
fighters' arms up, leaving the midsection unguarded. Experienced boxers take advantage of this and attack with knee or foot techniques.

Long-range elbow attacks are easy to evade, push aside or block with the forearm. A counter measure is to grab opponent's neck, pull it down, and execute a knee kick from the side to either ribs or head.



A long range elbow attack is blocked while defender grabs his opponent's neck and launches a knee attack.

## FIGHT NIGHT

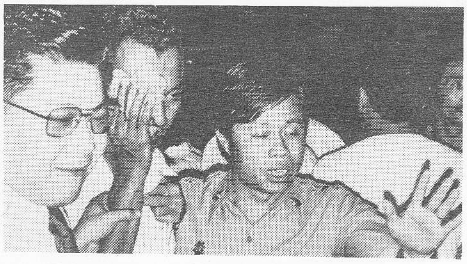
Those visiting or living in Bangkok have the opportunity to watch Muay-Thai bouts every day of the week, with some days even a choice of venue. Small wonder that fight fans in the capital have become jaded and hardly get excited, unless there is a major bout on the card. But not so in the provinces. Here it is only on a Friday or Saturday night that the crowds set out for the stadium to get their thrills.

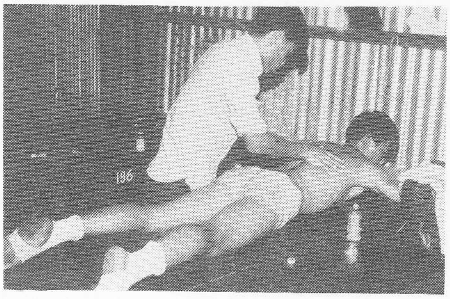
Music blares out of loudspeakers, and food stalls, vendors and kids selling soft drinks, cater to the hungry. The counter selling beer and spirits is crowded, doing a thriving business. In many stadia one is no longer allowed to take the bottle to one's seat, for fear that it might be used as a missile. The beer is poured into a plastic bag and closed with an elastic band through which a straw protrudes. This precaution, certainly not to a beer drinker's taste, has stopped the many injuries caused formerly by flying bottles.

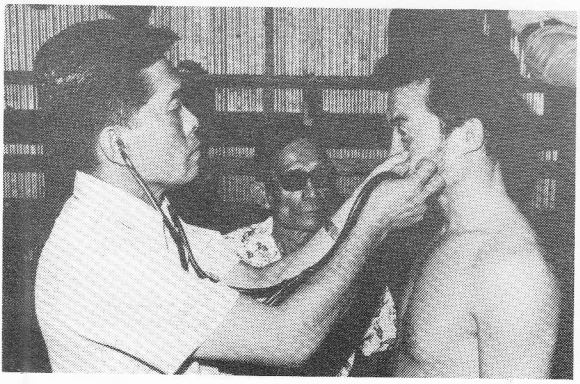
Small boys, and often the not so small, think up all sorts of tricks in order to slip past the ticket checkers or try to climb the fence for a free show. The fighters push their way through the crowds to get to their dressing rooms, where the ring doctor will examine them. He will pay particular attention to the boxers' eyes, looking for signs of drug taking. "Pot" smoking is not unusual among a section of the fighting community, but difficult to get away with before a bout. A few years ago during a program, held in a small village far up in the country's north, every boxer was as high as a kite, all having smoked a few "joints" prior to the fight. In the absence of a ring physician, an obviously unqualified medic had ignored his duties, but nobody cared. It was the most vicious slugging fest ever witnessed by the villagers, everybody having an absolute ball.

Once through the medical check, the boxers get a thorough massage with a liberal application of "nam man muay," the oil one's nose detects as far as thirty feet away. The groin guard is tied into place and hands are bandaged. Before the first bout starts, the royal anthem is played, during which everyone in the stadium stands at attention.

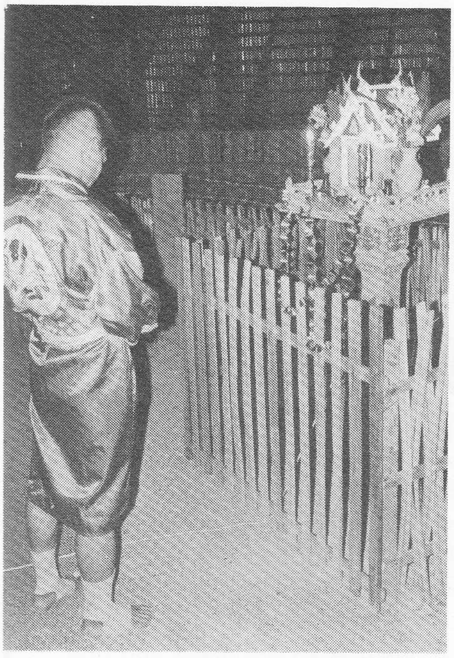
The fight programs held in Bangkok normally have eight or nine bouts on a card, with No. five always being the "koo ek," or star fight. In the provinces the number of bouts on any one night might be as many as twelve. In the major arenas the program is

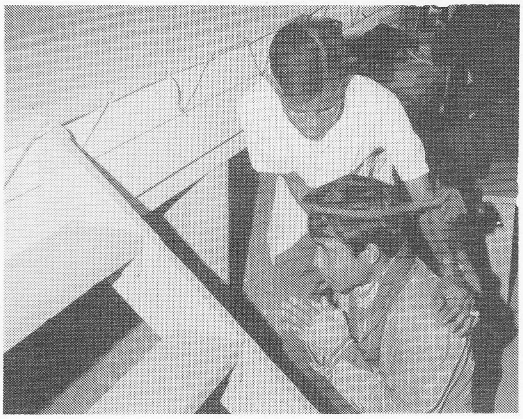






Each fighter has a thorough massage before the bout (above). A doctor checks each figher's eyes (lower left) before he enters the ring. The fights can be rough. Flying bottles make for nasty injuries requiring medical treatment for fans, fighters and officials. This fight fan (top, left) is on his way to the aid station.





A fighter prays before the bout. Here one communes with the spirits at the shrine, to be found in every stadium. A teacher and his student pray together before mounting the steps to the ring (above).

displayed on an oversized board, the "koo ek" set off in red. In rural areas, a promoter might or might not, hand out a printed sheet indicating which fighter fights whom in what bout.

A boxer, on the way from the dressing rooms to the ring, often makes a small detour to the shrine of the stadium's guardian spirit and, saying a short prayer, asks for protection. Most orthodox teachers will not let their students mount the steps to the fight platform before taking them aside and saying some incantations into their ear, followed by a short prayer. Many boxers stick a flower, given to them by well-wishers, to the post in their corner for good luck.

After climbing through the ropes, the referee inspects bandages, the groin guard and if necessary, orders excessive oil to be wiped off a fighter's body. The boxer sits down in his corner while his seconds put on his anklets and tie his gloves. A buzzer, operated by the time keeper, tells the band to start playing, which is the sign to perform the "wai kruh," followed immediately by the "ram muay," the boxing dance. After completion the boxer goes back to his corner, where a second or the trainer takes off the "mongkon," inserts the fighter's mouth guard and blows on his hair for good luck. The referee calls both fighters to the center of the ring and repeats a few rules, after which the gong strikes to announce the start of the first round.

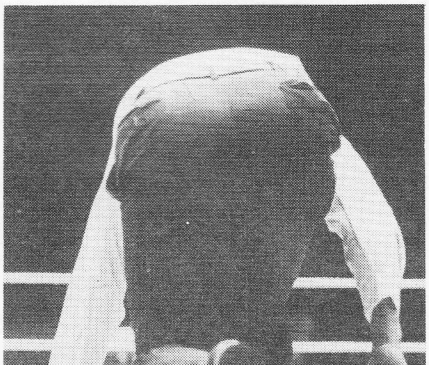
If the fight is good and the betting heavy, the crowd will soon be in a frenzy. The spectators actively participate by shouting their advice and can generate an unbelievable noise. When a referee's decision, although unalterable, is unpopular with the crowd, pandemonium breaks out. Fruit, plastic bags, filled often with ice cubes, even stones and bottles are thrown into the ring. Police and stadium guards have difficulty controlling the enraged fans but only until the start of the next bout, when everybody watches the action in the ring again. Fortunately, these mini-riots are the exception rather than the rule.

During the break between rounds the fighters are treated similarly to boxers in the West, getting a drink of water and being massaged. But one peculiarity one can often see, deserves mention. A flat zinc pan is shoved under the boxer's stool and he is doused with water, sometimes ice cold. The explanation is of course that this will cool off the body. A sports physician said: "We know well it's not a very wise thing to do, but it is an old habit and not easy to get rid of. Imagine a long distance runner, all exhausted and overheated, jumping straight into a cool swimming pool. It can kill the guy."

The sound of the buzzer tells the seconds that the next round is about to start. They push out the zinc pan, water buckets and

Unpopular decisions spell trouble. Police and officials pacify the crowd until the next bout starts. It's all part of the job for the referee collecting sandals, paper cups and packs of cigarettes thrown into the ring by enraged fans (right).

Voice of the Nation



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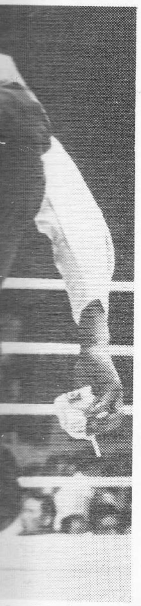

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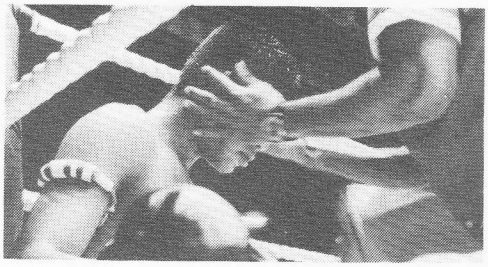
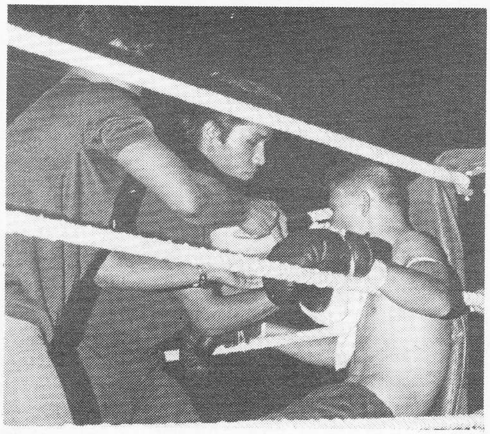


A massuer, also a second, massages his ward during the interval (above). Ice cubes to suck or a dousing with cold water may be part of the interval routine (right).



stool and leave the ring. Sometimes the fight is interrupted, when the lace of a glove comes untied or the "kruang rang," the armband, slips. Whenever the strings of the groin guard break, the boxer leaves the ring and puts on a new cup and the action continues.

After the last bout of the night the program might end with a prize awarding ceremony, during which trophies are awarded and special donations presented. If not otherwise arranged, the boxers will now go to the promoter's office to receive their purse there and then.

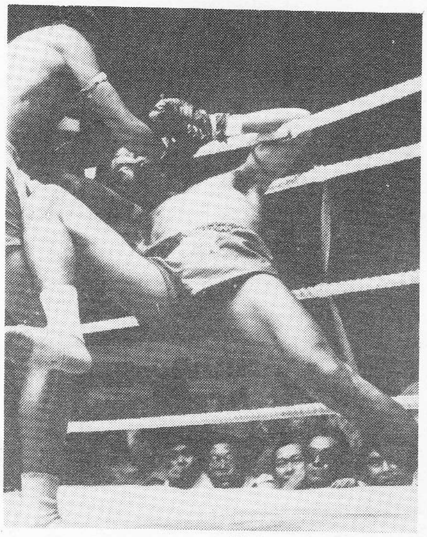
## MUAY-THAI VS. THE REST

Can a judoka beat a boxer? Would a wrestler have a chance against a karate expert? The question of superiority of style, although purely academic, is often discussed in martial arts circles but it has never worried the Thais. As far as they are concerned, there just isn't anything that can beat Muay-Thai. Experts with a knowledge of different fighting systems tend to disagree. They consider the Thai style crude and technically unsophisticated. So what does the argument look like in practice?

Thailand's four immediate neighbors are Malaysia in the south, Burma to the west and north and Laos and Cambodia in the east. While no record exists of a confrontation between Thais and Malaysian bersilat or moi-saree stylists, the Burmese have fought with Muay-Thai teams frequently until over fifteen years ago, when these meets suddenly stopped due to political reasons. Burmese boxing, a very tough fighting style, is not identical with Muay-Thai but does have similarities. Records of matches held after World War II show a more or less even score. In Laos and

Cambodia, Muay-Thai is practiced in its purest form, but boxers from either of the two countries have yet to beat a Thai fighter.

In some old journals we read of two French brothers who early in the century stepped off a ship in Bangkok to challenge anybody willing to fight. They were described as "Western style boxers and street fighters." Two Thais demolished them in no time. The Frenchmen were so impressed, that they stayed behind to learn this new fighting art. A famous battle still mentioned today, took place in 1921 between a Thai fighter and a Chinese from Kwangtung Province, reputed to have developed the use of "chi" to a very high degree. The bout ended in disaster for the Chinese, who had to spend months under medical care. In 1959 a team of Chinese tai-keck fighters lost to Thais, all by a first round knockout. Also in the late fifties, a karateka from Japan and a Filipino Western style boxer had challenged Thai fighters and were beaten. In 1962 an Indian wrestler lost to a Muay-Thai fighter in a one-sided match.



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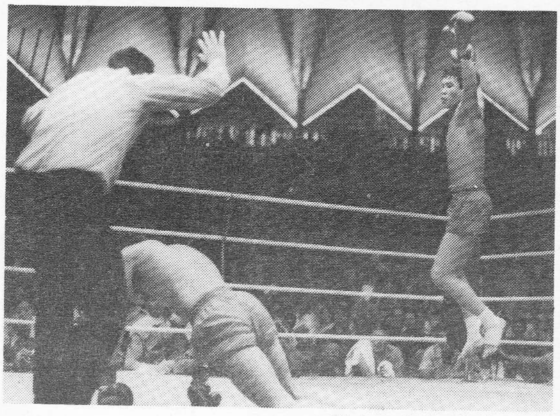


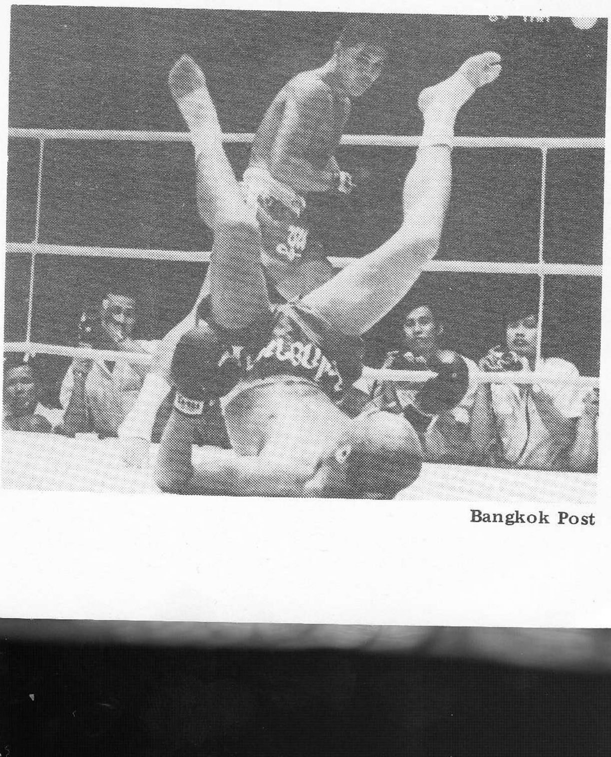
Voice of the Nation

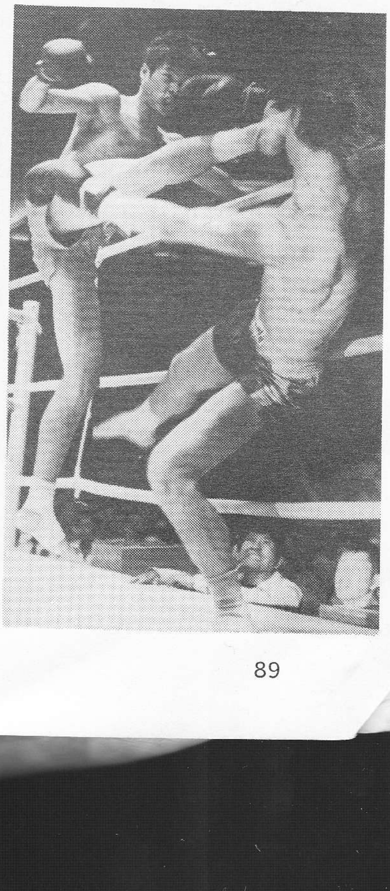
No Thai fighter has lost to those from neighboring countries. Here a Cambodian falls after a knee attack from his Thai opponent (left). Exalting in victory is a common sight between Thai boxers and "others."

Ever since kickboxing has become popular in Japan, Thai fighters have been invited to match their skills with the Japanese on the Tokyo fight circuit. Many of those going to Tokyo following the lure of big money, were unrated in Thailand and came back having lost half of their bouts. The scandal broke after some boxers admitted to having taken bribes. Substantial sums of money were earned by the Thais in return for a defeat in the ring. An uproar of indignation went through Thailand's fighting community, especially after films of these face-losing bouts, produced by Japanese promoters, were shown on American television. The issue resulted in a ban on Thai boxers fighting out of the country unless officially sent by an established organization. However, enforcement of the ban has been found to be impossible. Washed-up Bangkok fighters continue making money in Tokyo.

It was in 1972, when the "Battle of the Styles" mania started to grip Thailand. In April a team of six Japanese kickboxers arrived in Bangkok and was defeated; three knockouts, two point decisions, and one disqualification of a Thai boxer. A month later, two kickboxers from Tokyo fought at the Rajdamnern Stadium. The first was knocked out in the second round, the other won a points victory. Genta Katayama, a former karateka turned kickboxer, and fifth ranked bantamweight in the Japanese ratings, had shocked the local crowd and beaten his Thai opponent, who, although unranked, nevertheless had the advantage of fighting on home ground.

Thailand's Khumpol Sakronpitak got up from the floor (below) to beat his Japanese rival by a decision. Chennoi Sawsiriphan won on points, posture and style to beat Japan's Nagae (right).





Bangkok Post

August 13 and 20 of the same year were set for the first "World Thai Style Boxing Championships," to be held at the huge Hua Mark Stadium. Invitations were sent to Burma, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan, with an open call to all countries "where kickboxing is being practiced," to participate. A letter asking France to send a "savate" team was withdrawn with the explanation that the style was too different from Muay-Thai.

Japan was the only country to send a team. Six of the title bouts were staged on the 13th and all won by Thais, five by a knockout and one on points. The Japanese had included the American fighter, Raymond Edler, who was then the reigning middleweight champion of Japan. Edler is the only non-Thai ever rated in the Bangkok charts. On the strength of earlier bouts, fought in Thailand, he had occupied fifth place in the middleweight division a couple of years before. He lost the title match by a knockout in round four.

Part two of the championships took place a week later, on the 20th of August, 1972. Five of the seven Thai-Japanese confrontations were not rated as title bouts and won again by Thailand, four by knockouts, one on points. The two championship fights ended in points decisions, one for the home team, the other going to Japan. Mitsuo Shima, the Japanese featherweight champ, was the first non-Thai ever to have beaten a top rated Thai fighter, and in Bangkok at that.

Two months later, in October 1972, Rajdamnern Stadium staged another Muay-Thai vs. Japanese kickboxing program. Four k.o.'s and three point victories for the Thais was the result.

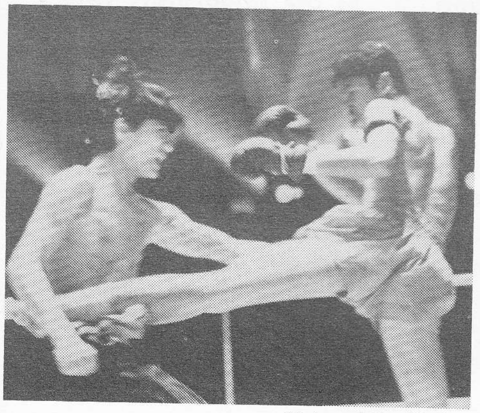
It was in December 1973, when Bangkonk's second prestige stadium, Lumpini, introduced the first kung-fu experts from Hong Kong. Both Chinese were knocked out in the first round. Hong Kong officials claimed that their fighters were at a disadvantage by having to wear gloves and being forced to observe the—to them—unfamiliar Thai rules. They called for a revenge match, this time free style and with bare hands. The Thais accepted. The date was set for January 22, 1974, as a major part of the Chinese New Year celebrations.

A crowd of 15,000 had come and packed the Hua Mark Stadium to watch the spectacle. Five of Hong Kong's best had arrived to show, with bare hands, the gloved Thais how to fight. The action in the ring lasted only six minutes and 22 seconds. All kung-fu fighters were disposed of in the first round. The Hong Kong team manager swore never to come back, saying, "Muay-Thai is too dangerous to be a sport."

During the same month of January '74, Nirund Boonyanet, a Thai student attending a university in the Philippines, entered an interstyle contest in Manila. He was matched against Filipino karateka Candido Picate, a well-known black belt and competitor. A second round technical knockout victory for the Muay-Thai fighter and seven stitches for the karate man resulted.

The Rajdamnern Stadium matched a Japanese kickboxer, who had undergone special training in a Muay-Thai camp in Bangkok for several months against an unrated Thai in February, 1974. The visitor gave an excellent performance but lost on points. In March, a team of Muay-Thai fighters from Cambodia arrived for a challenge contest. They were sent home with three k.o.'s and two point losses. During the same month three Chan Tung stylists came from Singapore, saying they would fight any Thai, anywhere in the world. Their main object was to avenge the loss of face their Hong Kong brothers had suffered two months earlier. Although the Chinese fighters gave a vastly superior performance, the packed-out Rajdamnern Stadium saw only six minutes of action. All three challengers were knocked out, two in the first, the other in the second round.

Gloves or no gloves, the Thais don't mind (above). Twenty seconds into the fight, a bare-handed Chinese falls victim to the Thai fighting spirit (right).



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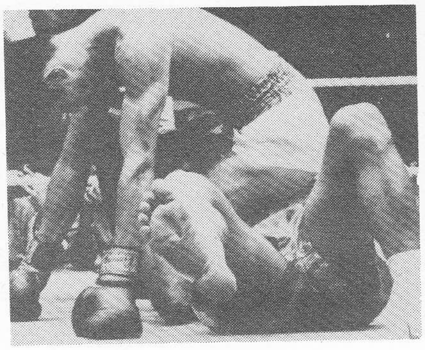
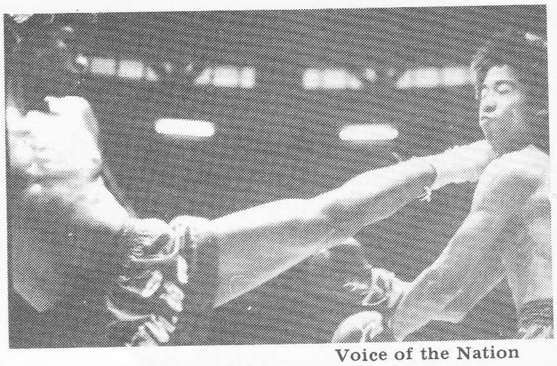
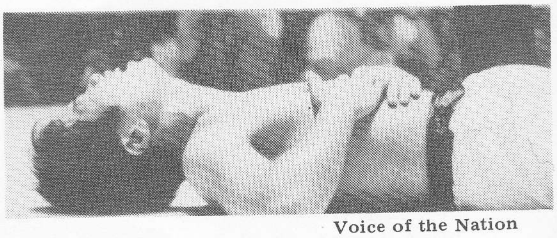




Voice of the Nation

In a world title bout, Shima, the Japanese featherweight, falls on his opponent. Shima won (above). Thai's rout Hong Kong's Kung-fu men (right) who could "not fight without gloves." KO number five in the match is at lower right.



Voice of the Nation

During the rest of the year further bouts with Japanese kickboxers ended in four knockouts, three point victories and one draw for the Thais. During an interstyle contest, held in October, 1974, Hideo Asano, a 40-year-old karate sensei from Japan challenged to fight any Muay-Thai teacher, "about my age." Chuchai Prakarnchai, a 48-year-old Bangkok instructor, lost no time in following the Japanese' call, winning by a technical knockout in the second round. The karate sensei left the ring in a pitiful state, having been saved from certain hospitalization only by the referee's intervention. During a "Five Nations—Five Styles" meet held in the same month, a Hong Kong kung-fu fighter was knocked out by a Thai boxer in the second round, leaving the ring on a stretcher.

Altogether an impressive record . . . . In the three years from 1972 to 1974, Thai fighters weren't knocked out once in fifty-five bouts against "others." The card reads: Fifty-one victories, of which thirty-seven were k.o.'s, one a draw, one a disqualification and two point losses. Those still arguing against Muay-Thai claim that it is not the style, but the vast ring experience and the incredible ability to take punishment, that wins their bouts. But whatever the pros and cons in the dispute, a common sense statement made by a young boxer, is perhaps the best answer, "It doesn't matter at all whether it's style, technique, ring experience, stamina or just plain guts. We keep on winnning, and as long as they don't beat us, we are the best."

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# GLOSSARY AND TERMINOLOGY

It is impossible to give the correct pronunciation of Thai words by using the Roman alphabet without auxiliary signs. However, by observing the following pronunciation guide, the words will be understood if used in context.

Pronounce:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| "a" like the | "u" in | cup | "i" like the | "i" in | fit |
| aa | a | spa | ee | ee | feet |
| ae | a | man | o | oa | board |
| ai | i | fight | u | u | put |
| aw | aw | law | oo | oo | food |
| e | e | set | ue | ui | French |
| eh | ea | bear | dt is a consonant somewhat between a "d" and "t." | | |

**Aenken** — Anklet, protecting instep and shin.
**Andap** — Ratings
**Baak** — Mouth
**Bangkok** — Capital of Thailand
**Bat** — Block
**Chaikrong** — Floating ribs
**Champ** — Champion
**Chiang Mai** — Provinicial capital in the North, second largest city of Thailand.
**Chok** — Fight
**Choraked faad haang** — Turn kick, literally the crocodile thrashes its tail
**Dadsin** — to judge, to decide
**Daihuachai** — Region under the heart, a vital point
**Dermpan** — A form of betting
**Dontree Muay** — The music played during a match
**Dtaa** — Eyes
**Dtaai** — to die
**Dtae** — to kick
**Dtae kao** — Knee kick
**Dtae Tao** — Kick with foot
**Dtae Wiang** — Round kick
**Dtai** — Kidneys, vital point
**Dtai Kao** — Knee kick from side
**Dtee** — to hit
**Dtee Mat** — to hit with the fist
**Dtee Sawk** — to hit with the elbow
**Dtoi** — to box, boxing
**Dtoi Lom** — Shadow boxing, literally to box with the wind or air
**Faad** — to thrash, wipe, swipe

**Faidaeng** — The red corner
**Fainamnerng** — The blue corner
**Gamagan** — Referee
**Gaan Dadsin** — Judging
**Gangkeng Muay** — Boxer's trunks
**Gawn Welah** — literally before time, gawn welah bouts are held before the actual program starts and are reserved for novices.
**Grajab** — Groin guard
**Grammom Srisa** — Top of head, a vital point
**Grasawb** — Bag, punching bag
**Hua** — Head
**Huajai** — Heart
**Hook** — Hook, the word is borrowed from English.
**Jad** — Promote
**Jamook** — Nose
**Kaa** — Leg
**Kaen** — Arm
**Kai** — Camp
**Kai Muay** — Boxing camp
**Kagangai** — Jawbone, a vital point
**Kamab** — Temples, vital points
**Kao** — Knee
**Kao Kong** — Over-arm knee kick
**Kao Loy** — Jumping knee kick
**Kao Drong** — Frontal knee kick
**Khuen Kroo** — The ceremony during which a teacher accepts a new student.
**Koo Ehk** — Main bout on a card, literally the number one pair.
**Kradot** — Jump
**Kradot Dtae** — Jump kick
**Kruang Rang** — Bands worn around biceps
**Kroo Muay** — Boxing teacher
**Kwaa** — Right, to the right
**Lang Tao** — Instep
**Limpee** — Solar plexus, a vital point
**Lop** — to duck
**Look Anta** — Testicles
**Look Gradueak** — Adam's Apple, a vital point
**Look Kang** — Chin, a vital point
**Mat** — Fist
**Mat at** — Uppercut

**Mat Drong** — Straight punch
**Mao Mat** — Punch drunk
**Mongkon** — The head band worn during prefight ceremony
**Muay Acheep** — Professional boxing
**Muay-Thai** — Thai-style boxing
**Muay Sakon** — International style boxing
**Na Kaeng** — Shin
**Nak Muay** — Boxer
**Namnak** — Weight
**Na Paag** — Forehead
**Nuam** — Gloves
**Pang-nga** — to dodge, evade
**Paa Pan Mue** — Bandages worn under gloves
**Pee Liang** — Seconds
**Raigaan Muay** — Boxing program
**Ram Muay** — Boxing dance, part of the prefight ritual.
**Run** — Weight category
**Saai** — Left, to the left
**Sanam Muay** — Boxing stadium
**Sangwien** — Ring Ropes
**Sawing** — Swing, the word comes from the English "swing."
**Sawk** — Elbow
**Taitoi** — Nape, a vital point
**Tao** — Foot
**Teep** — Push or thrust with the underside of the foot.
**Teep Dan Lang** — Foot thrust to the rear
**Teep Dueh Son** — Heel push
**Teep Drong** — Straight forward foot push
**Ting** — Throw
**Tong** — Stomach
**Tong Noi** — Lower stomach, a vital point
**Uppercut** — Uppercut, borrowed from English
**Wai Kroo** — Obeisance to the teacher, part of the prefight ritual.
**Wehtee** — The ring, a stage
**Wong** — Band (musical)
**Wong Muay** — The band playing during matches
**Yaeb** — Jab, borrowed from English
**Yaek** — Break, used by referee in the ring to separate fighters.
**Yang gan fan** — Mouth guard
**Yok** — Round
**Yud** — Stop, used by referee.

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